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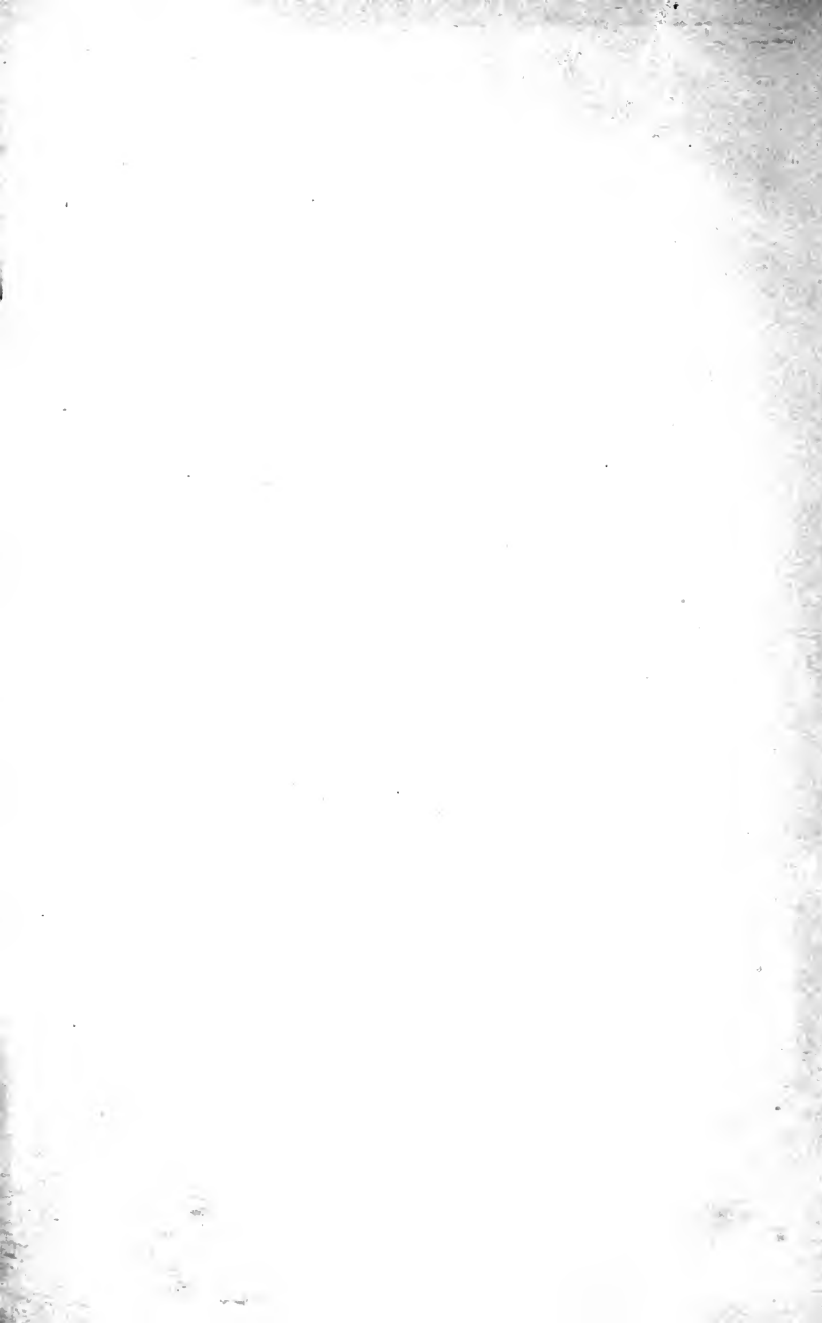
Allen Davenport

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1907
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A series of fifteen pamphlets issued weekly on Tuesdays
from January 15 to April 23, inclusive

NUMBER ONE

JANUARY 15, 1907

STAGE AFFAIRS IN AMERICA TODAY

BY

ALLEN DAVENPORT

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

P. O. BOX 1341

SINGLE NUMBERS TEN CENTS

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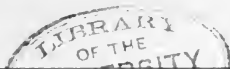
Joseph C. Ravell Esq.

Dear Sir:

Your communication of the 5th inst. is at hand. It offers me a genuine sense of rational satisfaction to hear that your "University of California" is pleased in receiving "Stage Affairs".

I forwarded No. 1. with others of a limited list of discriminate distribution. Its failure to arrive puzzles me. But I will immediately forward another copy as soon as I can procure one. Should any later ones

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not reach you, it would be
a favor at your hands to
advise me so.

Very respectfully yours
Allen Davenport

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Joseph H. C. Russell Esq.
"University of California".

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Stage Affairs in America Today.

—BY—

ALLEN DAVENPORT.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

This pamphlet edition of "Stage Affairs" contains fifteen numbers; they will appear serially on Tuesdays of each week from January 15 to April 23, 1907 (inclusive). In earnestly soliciting attention to the opinions offered herein, my chief credential that might seem to warrant such entreaty, is the accrument of more than sixteen years of intimate, active association and critical observance of the people and conditions of the theatre in America; their aims, tendencies and resultant effects; and with a wholesome desire to justly praise all that which is good, and to modestly suggest what (in my opinion) would serve as a remedial adjustment for that which is evil. This I shall do with sound conviction, with profound respect, and an ardent, optimistic enthusiasm for the stage of the future, and truly innocent of any ill-disposed intent to assail and belie the established creeds and managerial methods of its institutions and their incumbents of to-day. Any critical comment seeking to interestedly regulate such early convictions (for the author is widely awake to the detriment ef-

fect to initiatory writers through an exuberancy of ideas and diction) will be considered a mark of benevolent attention, and truly a favor. And whatsoever herein might gain some support from any stable source, in thinking to notice such, would tend only to more speedily correct any convictions that more able and experienced judges were indulgent enough to adversely, with honesty, remark upon.

ALLEN DAVENPORT.

I.

THE PLAYWRIGHT.

THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF HIS COMMISSION.

The playwright, the manager, the actor. If the theatre would wish to exist for the highest fulfilment of its proper mission, and remain in an indissoluble state of stable worth, the above-mentioned primal, co-essential forces in co-efficient form, must exist in a co-harmonious plan of superior workmanship. Each one is highly necessary to the other; but the playwright is the very heart of this tri-essence, and should (its other co-essential factors working all in trinitarian confederacy) pulsate into vigorous life and health the substance which this vital union shapes, — the institution of the theatre. The condition of playwright is the vital fluid flowing throughout this substance. The state of healthiness or impoverishment of this fluidity manifests and determines the condition of the substance it sustains. The condition

of the theatre is soundest when the heart-essence, the playwright, maintains it by the highest degree of purity.

And in what one particular element is preserved the greatest purity and lasting strength of the drama? In its diction; in the intellectuality, elegance and effectualness of its language. While a play should present a theme worthy of consideration, sanely founded, methodically constructed, thoughtfully promoted, interestingly, entertainingly and absorbingly pursued, brought adroitly and forcibly to a logical climax, then finally its plot and sub-plots concisely, unflaggingly and clearly determined, — nevertheless, — as necessary and important as these stipulations are to the best condition of play-writing, they do not attain for the author (even when apparent to an exceptional degree) a condition of real worth in the art of play-writing if he fails of intellectual, elegant and effective diction.

The playwright may entertain lofty, beautiful, fanciful thoughts and images, he may be able to quite sufficiently suggest such images through the mechanical resources of pageantry and stage effectualness generally; but no mere pantomime nor mechanical device can ever supplant the necessity of a corresponding loftiness of diction to truthfully reveal any high thoughts purposed. The playwright may be able to picture, and reproduce with faithfulness, the ordinary scenes of life; but, if we are to gain in the rightful mission of the stage, higher thoughts and better life, unless the playwright can exalt his images to something superior, and sustain in his diction a corresponding fitness, the stage had better totally surrender any intention of a proper beneficence to

mankind, than to proclaim and champion such sentiment, and yet blemish its worthiness by permitting the intrusion of such miserly mocksters as find sanction from its careless guardians, both screened by a blind understanding of what the public wants. And it is in the ability of the playwright to translate his best mentality into exalted diction that shall secure the best condition of the essential force of which he is the vital factor. The language, the diction of a play, whether read or listened to, is the ever predominant force that seizes and holds the attention.

And it is in the exaltedness of diction, the attainment of it, that we alone can hope for the best condition of histrionic art. It is the force and power of that diction that prompts and compels the greatest accomplishments of the actor. It makes possible all the higher, the embodied variety of facial expression and gesture that such diction must naturally contain. Even in the matter of common pantomime it is a language that prompts and compels it. The fact that pantomime, inarticulate language, has never, nor can it ever, transcend the importance of diction, articulate language, in the exposition of a play, argues for the essential need of playwrights distinguished in the superiority of their diction. To regulate and utilize thoughts and ideas for the purposes of pantomime is a matter of calculative mechanism. The material of this storage force to be sent through the organic regulators to become pantomime, inarticulate language, is, most generally, of very ordinary importance. It is not difficult to find competent regulators for such. But when this vital storage force transcends to grandeur and sublimity, no regulators can be found to fully sustain its tremendousness through the mere

channels of pantomime alone, not only because of their failure often to completely or sufficiently understand the highest purposes of such mental concealments, but because of the vital predominance of the language itself over all other conditions that go towards the making of a play. It must follow that only in an intelligent, elegant and effectual grasp and exposition of the diction of a play can be found the test of an actor's greatest endurance. A system of acting based on pantomime is fundamentally wrong. It sets in action the agents to emphasize, whereas they should be trained to control, emotions. No actor was ever great who was not proficient in a mental grasp and exposition of his native tongue or the language of his adoption. An emigrant just off a steamer might indicate in very good pantomime his wishes; but, even in his own tongue, he could only inelegantly express himself. More care and attention should be given to the development of a high importance of diction in play-writing.

I admit a purposely intentioned exaggeration, but notwithstanding contend that a most visible modicum of justifiable aptness must be seen in the statement that too many authors of to-day write their plays during the progress of a rehearsal, and even of its performances. A noted playwright who has recently visited America and lectured at some of her leading universities, speaks wisely and vitally in urging the publication of plays. This would be of benefit to the public, of course, of vast importance to the studious actor devoted to his art, and its advantages tending towards a better condition of critical review would be manifold. But there is yet another reason why such a condition should exist. For the sake of

the playwright himself and the exaltation of his art. The exposition of his diction would serve as an impetus to excel in that essential. It would wonderfully help to correct and improve the vital force of the playwright's task, the purity of the diction through which he manifests his types and ideas. Many authors will say here, "You can't tell anything about a play till you have rehearsed it"; then when you are rehearsing they will say, "You can't tell till you have tried it." And when you have tried it, what is the test of its fitness to survive? The immediate condition of public approval that has been incited and maintained by the various mediums of modern advertisement? The verdict of the press for or against? The significance of a long run? And many other stipulations entering into the capriciousness of the public and ingenuity of managerial skill? No,—the test of endurance in any play is the hold and respect it will command when you take it down from the shelf to read; when its diction contains some quality of permanence. That is the vitality of any play, and I believe that that is the first reason why they should be published. That would necessitate a state of preparation, and compel care in the matter of diction. If the playwright is doubtful of the value of some of the situations, effects and "business" he has employed, he should not hesitate to confer with some master in that department. The playwright should seek also the critic in the preparation of his composition. I mean the truly distinguished individual of that craft. One of the great impediments to the attainment of exaltation in stage affairs to-day is in the alarming unconcerned state of unpreparedness in all its conditions. When such a condition is altogether

apparent with the playwright, the vital force of the stage, it necessarily follows that all adjunctive forces must suffer from the stagnancy caused by their predominant governing power.

Not long ago there appeared a reported interview wherein an American playwright, one truly enjoying marked prominence and profit from his works, complained (in words to this effect, at least) that he had to endure no small amount of criticism from fellow associates of his craft because he treated the matter of play-writing as such a serious one; his critics, furthermore, dwelling on the comparative inconsequence of the condition of play-writing in America to-day. There is abundant proof of the truth of that reported assertion. We have a few very clever writers of smart plays. That cannot be denied. But their trivial designs and reckless diction (though often of momentary exhilaration and pleasing entertainment) would seem to strengthen any argument purporting an inclination, or a determined intention on the part of the author, not to treat the quality of his commission, or the importance of his mission, with any commendable seriousness. It is either that or a lack of proper effort; and perhaps an inability to rise above the medium of prim mediocrity. There would seem to be ample reason to suspect the latter weakness, for in the few attempts made by these writers to construct on some theme of vital importance, they signally fail, not only in maintaining the theme itself, but in their endeavor to fittingly dignify with robes of worthy diction the form that they supply. In America to-day there are many who are skilled in the practice of play building, perhaps, but their diction is seldom above the medium of colloquialism, and often

descends to the plane of commonplace conversation, and not infrequently to the condition of unlearned, ill-mannered talk.

The playwright who is not heedful of the unlimited benefits he is empowered to bestow upon, and the real usefulness of the service he owes to and holds the authority to exercise over his public, can never rightfully hope for permanent and valuable profit to that public or to himself. The playwright has a great commission! He who usurps that trust and debases it with the substitution of criminal counterfeit,—the outgrowth of cunning ignorance, misdirected energy, and wilful plagiarism,—threatens public decorum, poisons its taste, and stagnates its higher instincts and nature. The playwright at best is the clergyman in the consecrated seclusion of his workroom. The stage, to fulfil a mission greater than does any other institution save that of the church, must be rescued from the clutches of irregular commercialism, illiteracy and charlatanry. It must invite, promote and maintain a status of high import. And this status must be attained by — and when once assured always receive — the unswerving support of that co-efficient, co-harmonious threefold working force — manager, playwright, actor.

The playwright's labor finds expression through the co-operate, adjunctive mediums of stage manager, actor, singer, scenic artist, musician, and the art mechanics of the theatre. These offices are responsible ones, and the discharging of their functions has much to do with making or marring the discourse of the playwright. We should hold them high and follow them honestly, but none of these adjuncts should be so lavishly employed as to predominate,

darken or impede the play; they should accompany, illumine and hasten it. Can we to-day truly say that this is often so? What commission does the playwright receive from the manager? Does the manager say, "Write me a play of worthy theme, noble purpose, literary elegance, dignified personages, pleasing, wholesome comedy, action, and so on, then when you have completed the mental conception we will select some pretty colors of human type to express your image within an appropriate frame"? No, he more likely says, "I have some pretty colors and a handsome frame; patch me up a picture"; or, "Here is a popular novel; pick out the glaring threads and sew them into a single garb." The manager himself sometimes presumes this mission; the actor also. The mediocre clergyman, the sensational preacher, rushes in to fill the vacuum unpossessed of worthy matter. He seldom maintains the meanest idealism of his pulpit. With the adjuncts that the theatre supplies, he should embellish and exalt his context. Then again the newspaper journalist invades the field. He holds some uses that the manager is not unmindful of. It is quite evident that the fraternity of the press will make some sympathetic response; that is altogether wrong if the material under consideration be not worthy. The playwright's is an art by itself! And if there be men and women desirous of preparing, studying and finishing it as such, what hope lies before to inspire them or help at hand to maintain them, when such impudent usurpation of their proper commissions confronts them?

Furthermore, with stage affairs in America to-day, it is not generally the play, but the player, that receives the first consideration. If this player were



most always proficient in his art, we would not so much complain; or were he true to a proper exposition of its best purposes. But such is not often the case. This player rarely is selected because of his exceptional talent, but most frequently because of some youthful charm of person, extraordinary mold of beauty; sometimes through the highest degree of creative taste and fashion in dress and make-up; then again through some natural, unhelpable peculiarity of speech or manner; and still again by possession of hereditary inheritance; and in a few instances through the enjoyment of an income (or means at hand through other channels) to buy a vehicle in which to parade his pretence. To fit any one or all, of these forms with tinsel robes to hide their deformities and immerge the drifting parasites in tow, is, in the general conduct of affairs to-day, the enforced commission of the one who furnishes entertainment for the theatre's patrons. This is affording sensual sustenance to the prodigal, and starving the home. The manager orders it, the playwright provides it, the actor exhibits it, and the public buys and partakes of it.

Wherein lies the remedy? Not with the public, surely. Because a child prefers salads and pastries to substantial, wholesome diet is poor excuse for giving it to him. But he will take it if you are so unwise as to indulge him. To develop and preserve a healthy physical condition in mankind is vitally important. At times, if the ingredients be pure and well prepared, no special harm can follow in allowing the child a judicious amount of salad and pastry. But he should be made to prefer and partake of the wholesome first. That is a duty of his providers.

We are all children of the nation. We wish to develop and preserve for it a mental wholesomeness as well. To do that properly we must develop and preserve a preference for what is good and substantial. That condition apparent in the individual sustains the totality. But be assured too many of us will prefer salad and pastry if you so indulge us. Here also it is the providers who are responsible. With them it should be a duty to provide wholesomeness if we would develop and preserve in mankind a condition of mental healthiness. Now and again, if the ingredients be pure and well prepared, a little salad and pastry is a good thing even as a mental diet.

And so the manager and actor must realize and acknowledge, the former his true mission of the institution he conducts, the latter a reverence for the art he professes. Then both should confess and maintain a fidelity and support to the playwright desirous of fulfilling his offices through a determination to excel by devoted energy and through emulation of the best and highest that have preceded him. And at last, these three primal factors working in co-efficient, co-harmonious union establishes a standard, and at once compels and holds the desired following, fulfilling in truth the wholesome aims of the vital trust they form,—the theatre. No one really wants an impure if he can have a pure article. Once he has been enabled to distinguish the latter, he won't take the former. If the manager were a man of integrity, he wouldn't order it. If the playwright wrote for the dignity of his art, for the intellectual purity, moral soundness of his great charge, he wouldn't provide it. If the actor regarded the beauty of the

art he professes, he wouldn't exhibit it. These conditions respected, it wouldn't be for sale; the public could not buy, and therefore would not have it to partake of. The manager must be honest in his business, the actor reverent to his art, the playwright faithful to his trust, both the former aiding him with fidelity and support.

So encourage, honor and respect the commission of the playwright. Seek to exalt it, that the skilful may build with gold, marble and oak; not debase it, submitting it to usurpation for the wanton apprenticeship to flout with foil, dirt and knotted driftwood. The playwright should always create superior types, except in cases of rare characters of positive dialects. Those the author should clearly define, and the employment of art in acting alone reveal. Reproducing on the stage conversation as it happens generally in real life is at best uninteresting, and often when truthfully transplanted, compromising to the best standard we might hope to maintain. This unreasoned strife for realistic touches in stage exhibition is (in its commonplace indifference and incongruous absurdity) impoverishing the vital properties of fanciful imagery, illusion and logically proportionate theatric effect; conditions that are the very props that sustain the best achievements and possibilities of the theatre. A critic prominent in a large theatrical city recently wrote as follows concerning a play strained with attempts at realistic effectualness: "Yet, with all this faithful devotion to realism, the —— (naming the play) remains unconvincing." It is impossible ever to convince of the utmost effectualness and dramatic worth of a play where authors insist on a reverence for realism in a theme

of common importance spun into a dramatic fabric through the medium of characters intending to transplace ordinary events in everyday life.

The stage of any nation should at any sacrifice and at all times maintain the purity of the mother tongue. The theatre should establish a criterion regarding the highest uses of the language of the people it entertains and instructs. As in a plea against the adoption of a curtailed system of spelling, so far more in an earnest cry for a purer understanding and a higher and more truthful exposition of the diction by which we express interchange of thought, let never the essence of a spirit of highest development descend to the demands and approval of carelessness and ignorance; but ever strive rather to enable that condition to approximately understand and reach the utmost exaltedness that such a spirit should truly inspire. Have done with puerile sentimentality, fetid sensationalism, comic ridicule, and their misnomer, *heart* interest. Build us plays of art design, pulsating life and thought through the channels of truth, purity and beauty, all centred in the vitality and nobleness of some true heart interest.

Number Two of "Stage Affairs," appearing January 22, 1907, concerns:

THE BUSINESS MANAGER.

HIS TRUE MISSION.





JAN 29 1907

A series of fifteen pamphlets issued weekly on Tuesdays
from January 15 to April 23, inclusive

NUMBER TWO

JANUARY 22, 1907

STAGE AFFAIRS IN AMERICA TODAY

BY

ALLEN DAVENPORT



BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

P. O. BOX 1341

SINGLE NUMBERS TEN CENTS

Previous Issues of "Stage Affairs."

**No. 1. The Playwright. The Vital Importance
of His Commission.**

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Stage Affairs in America Today.

—BY—

ALLEN DAVENPORT.

II.

THE BUSINESS MANAGER.

HIS TRUE MISSION.

It is not the spirit of commercialism itself that can ever stand a menace to a healthy progression in art endeavor; that, to the contrary, is its essential benefactor; but it is the ambitious strife to arrest, through loose integrity and a sacrifice of approximate idealism, the true mission of the high purposes of these conditions, and by the official force of monopolistic measure to gain and hold in close controlment the righteous freedom and natural legality of individual endeavor for supremacy, practised through the lawful ways and means of honesty, thrift and genuineness. To-day we are fast building commercial jails, and stuffing them with imprisoned wealth and empty notoriety. And yet the condition of equal opportunity has never before been so apparent and accessible as it is to-day. And the possibility of this most desirable condition has been due in no small measure to the beneficence of many individuals, who, in their quality

of commercial importance, are ignorantly misjudged and abused by the very ones to whom they open a highway of plain direction, if such would but follow, and not transgress its roadway. I admire and believe in an honest fight for individual supremacy; but as bitterly despise the vain supremacy that finds its ends through doubtful integrity and a disregard for approximate idealism.

In America to-day very nearly every condition and phase of the theatre that might and should tend towards placing its institutions on a high standard of business integrity, establishing a criterion in the composition and exhibition of dramatic material, and raising its expositors, the actors, to a just significance of the title "artist," — as one professing proper skill in the true accomplishment of a fine art, — nearly all such conditions and phases have become subservient to, or are wholly immersed in, the one predominant stipulation — irregular commercialism. While, when applied to the legitimate and necessary occupations in life (where actual needs are at the dictatorial dispensation of presumptuous control), such a condition is most deplorable and more freely open to censure, notwithstanding, in matters of art publication and exhibition directly affecting the moral and mental condition of the people, it should be none the less exempt from just criticism and an honest solicitation towards approximate adjustment.

Business is trade; buying and selling to realize a profit. A man is in business to make money. The theatre manager is no exception to this rule. If, with his business tact, he combines artistic tendencies and advances them to his common benefit, it is indeed a happy condition. But we look only for

business qualities in the theatre manager. As a business man conducting a first-class establishment, buying and selling, — trading, — his all-important requisite should be integrity. He should deal in pure, unadulterated goods. He is dealing in a luxury, in a way, an extravagance. It is not, of course, a necessity strictly speaking. From a purely business point of view he might be classed, in just importance, with the wine merchant and the tobacconist; or any tradesman that, in an indulgence of his wares, in any degree, such gratification necessarily takes the form of a luxury.

In a way, the theatre merchant has the greater trust. He has in charge the mental and moral factors of the public he sells to. The wine merchant and the tobacconist perhaps satisfy first the appetite; they furnish first a sensual feast, which, if abused, it is true might readily impair, not only the physical condition, but the mental and moral agents as well. The theatre merchant supplies a feast also; it is a visual, intellectual one, but which, if offered in an impure, adulterate form, might easily assail the mental and moral agents. All of these merchants deal in luxuries, which, if impure and adulterated, become a menace to society, producing an evil condition. Their trusts are solemn ones. Perhaps you will say, the wine merchant and the tobacconist are dealing in tangible stable goods, while the theatre merchant deals only in unfixed, vacillating material. You will not be altogether wrong at this day in saying so. But right does not always consist of what is, but rather what might and should be.

The theatre should be a methodic business, not a speculative chance. It should be a durable play-

house in the keeping of honest, staid merchantmen, not a trifling plaything in the hands of feverish, changeable gamesters. Every reputable merchant to maintain his custom must keep his goods pure and unadulterated. The merchant, if he be honest, will, when offering a new line of goods to his customers and smaller dealers, be careful of the quality before he offers it. He will put it to a test. Even then it does not always meet favor with his custom; but if he be honest, he quickly withdraws it. The customer will seldom complain. He may say that the goods do not come up to his expectation, and he prefers not to handle them. He may offer no explanation. The merchant he has received them from has his confidence. He knows of his integrity, and such an occurrence could not sever their bond of trade.

The theatre manager does not recognize any special test of the goods he is about to dispense. He says, "We never know till we have tried a play whether it will go or not." He means by that, make money or not. If, when he has tried it, the public and press unite in repelling it, in refusing to handle it, does the theatre manager always quickly withdraw it? In a few cases, where it is a hopeless failure beyond any dispute, he may perhaps; but generally speaking he resorts to methods to force his goods upon unknowing customers. He sets to work play-jobbers to hack and hew and patch up again; to interpolate, regardless of congruity, just proportions and continuity; any means that may lead to a readjustment of his pecuniary outlay and a hope of ultimate remunerative gain on imperfect, unsatisfactory material. He discriminately and indiscrim-

inately fills his theatre night after night with the show of patronage. He appropriates from press clippings fragments of sentences and falsely applies them in advertising purposes to deceive the public, his customers. He forces an unwarranted number of performances, and then prepares to send his salesmen ahead to delude his foreign buyers into purchasing his latest line of goods. He often supplies the places of superior, high-priced actors with inferior, low-paid talent. He cuts and trims where he can, and then advertises the complete production, with its original cast. This is not business integrity, and it does not deserve success. But it too often attains its end, —satisfying box-office receipts. But it is truly a condition of irregular commercialism.

In this great expansive country, the existence of trusts, if they are honest in purpose and method, is a condition much to the public's good. Indeed, it becomes almost a necessity in facilitating large operations. But if a trust is not honest, the extent of the evil it is capable of committing is in just proportion to the monstrosity of the corporation itself. It is the vicious spirit of monopoly that is to be dreaded. That spirit, evident at the inception, transmits to its offspring, the trust, the same disposition. That condition, uncorrected and animated through disregard of integrity, grows into the corrupt monster that must feed on the vitality of its smaller species if it would subsist. When it has sufficiently devoured this sustenance, and corrupted it hopelessly by contaminating embodiment, and nothing more remains to glut its abnormal craving, it decays in the natural stagnancy of its corruptness, and carries along with it all that has succumbed to its tyranny.

For what it has consumed and unremittingly destroyed, it makes no restitution. But if this trust be honestly fathered, it transmits an inheritance of good, which, if uprightly pursued, and its offspring not liable of seizure and surrender to this vicious spirit, grows into a vast beneficence. If the natural area of its activity encroaches on its smaller kind, it makes reparation for its trespass by the added advantages, facilities and reasonableness of charges offered to its beneficiaries, the public. If its practices be regular and the material it dispenses honest, this is lawful competition and beneficent. It does not seek to prevent competition; it invites and exhilarates it by the mere fact of its regularity and honesty. The men who conduct the business are honest, the ones who furnish the counters are honest, and the ones who dispense the goods are honest, even though they may all contain one head. Every moral and lawful obligation is fulfilled to the purchasers. If the business of the theatre could be relieved of speculation, dishonesty and charlatanry, and placed in the power of honest business managers, dealing with honest playwrights, and dispensing through honest actors, all working through the offices of trusts honestly fathered, it would truly lead to the proper adjustment of the theatre in America, and by the integrity of its providers, relieve the compliant and indulgent public of any further show of indiscreet civility. Such a state of affairs is impossible now, of course. The stipulated conditions must be steadily and healthily brought to a fixedness and realization of their just importance.

Merited independence can not be despotically set aside. It must either sink or succumb to the irreg-



ularities and practices of that despotism first. Monopoly is contrary to nature, and consequently only nature herself can best provide the condition that shall dethrone its tyranny. You cannot supplant it otherwise except by the triumph of enforced despotic competition of another monopoly, that must in time become as vicious as the one overthrown. To advance the theatre to the true dignity and rightful power that would claim the respect of all honest trade, it should be represented by merchants whose purposes and methods exemplify in highest meaning the word "integrity." Integrity of the individual in an honest fight for supremacy. If that individual stands for the dominant power of some big combination, just to the extent that the scope of his trust offices exceeds that of the single-handed individual, just to that farther reaching and broader extent becomes he capable of benefiting the public and the class of workmen he must employ, which means still farther an accrued advantage to the general condition of workmen. But he must be genuinely honest. Then, the trust creates and speeds good. But if dishonest, it must equally retard and demoralize any possible prospect of lasting benefit.

While the theatre manager should have positive views, and exercise the right to judge as to what material shall be exhibited from his stage, he should never presume to manage the preparation and exposition of it. That he may suggest or advise in quiet counsel is perfectly proper and desirable; but the affairs of the stage should be completely under the executive control of a competent stage manager. Each should amicably serve as a balance to the conservatism or liberalism of the other. We should do

away with stage synonyms; the stage director, the play producer, the actor-manager (the Pooh Bah of the theatre), who too often leaves no mark of future regard save the self-satiation of his personal vanity. We except, of course, a few of the great minds that have lent distinction and insured future worth to the stage. But they are few, and even with some of them it is questionable whether any positive benefit can accrue the future state of the stage through the greatness of actor-managers, who, in their autocratic insistence of a condition of complete subserviency to their predominant mentality, have checked and suffocated any apparent audacity of individuality fighting for deserved supremacy.

But to revert to the manager and now briefly discuss the tangibility of the material at the disposal of this theatre merchant. He conducts an art store. In the material he handles he is greatly reliant on a judicious employment and association with playwright, actor, musician, singer, scenic artist, art mechanics; and, in the provident production of their crafts. If these workers be proficient in their separate vocations, if they have prepared (before they profess to practise) their arts, if they be reliable, and honestly endeavor to best aid the manager and serve his patrons, the results of such purpose must be of tangible, stable worth, and sterling material to traffic in. But if they be incompetent, charlatans and dishonest, brazenly intruding into such domains, unprepared, unpractised, without even having served an apprenticeship, their wares consequently sink to the state of unfixed, vacillating worthlessness. To exhibit such material is hazarding a chance. It is mere speculation. It is dishonest. If the manager is cog-

nizant of such existing conditions (and of course he often must be), he so declares himself a trickster. If he wishes to be faithful and honest to the best purposes of his trust and to his public, he would neither employ nor associate with any craftsman whose work did not possess the quality of tangible, stable worthiness. It is to be lamented that this condition of unpreparedness and incompetency exists almost exclusively in the vocations of the actor and the playwright, the two conditions of all that should be found most thoroughly prepared and proficient. The arts of scene painter, musician, and even mechanic are virtually pursued with much more general methodical preparation, progression and finish than are those of actor and playwright. What wonder, then, that the spectacular and musical element of stage production predominates to-day. It is by virtue of a natural right. Not until the condition of actor and playwright be raised to a status of self-evident import, and some guarantee of fixedness attached to their liableness in the practise of their profession, just so long as these channels are open to the reckless intrusion of any mean applicant that has become possessed with a desire to write plays and act, unmindful of his lack of any proper degree of preparation or fitness to engage in such nice occupations, and just so long as the business manager will hazard a chance with such, through his speculative greed to seek quick pecuniary advantage, just so long there can be no healthy drama, nor any tangible worth attached to the trade of the theatre manager, nor any consequent dignity, importance and just respect shown for the institution he conducts — the theatre.

Assure the public of your integrity of purpose, and

even if your production does not always come up to highest expectation, that public will not censure nor forsake you. It will leniently overlook the momentary relapse, and rest content in the assurance that the next offering will attain the standard of excellence which your integrity has taught them to expect. If it be argued that the supply cannot always meet the demand, I would reply that there lie unused hundreds of classic and standard dramas, high-class comedies, opera bouffe and burlesques, which in the hands of the skilled playwright and musician, aided by the adept stage manager, could, by expert uses of modern appliances, equipments and mechanical devices of the theatre of to-day, be reconstructed into highly approved, intellectual and relishable entertainment. At all events, they would be preferable to the inane, plotless fabrications of vulgar action and verbal slush concocted by brazen incompetency. Famous musicians and distinguished librettists have lent their art and talents to the building of opera bouffe and burlesque; now lost arts, emerged in the hectic whirl of distorted dialect, monkey grimaces and insolent ridicule masquerading as satire. Honesty and integrity in the business manager would move him to promote the former to the exclusion of the meaningless medley of current amusement that disturbs the best purposes of the theatre to-day. Such action would inspire an awakening to higher efforts in play-writing, and the ultimate results of such endeavor would furnish reliable material; tangible art goods. The theatre merchant then might take his place amongst the foremost tradesmen of the day. In his integrity and bid for public trust and confidence, it would not be unusual to find him presiding at some

distinguished board of direction. Such a condition of reliable theatre traffic, either independently conducted, or through the channels of honest combination, free from the irregular practices of base monopoly and selfish gain, would eventually place the theatre in unquestioned repute as a public benevolence and educator, and would ever foreshow, an inheritance to others, and not alone tell, the mere momentary possession of individual personality and speculative flurry.

Number Three of "Stage Affairs," appearing January 29, 1907, concerns:

THE ACTOR:

THE QUALITY OF HIS IMPORTANCE.



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A series of fifteen pamphlets issued weekly on Tuesdays
from January 15 to April 23, inclusive

NUMBER THREE

JANUARY 29, 1907

STAGE AFFAIRS IN AMERICA TODAY

BY

ALLEN DAVENPORT



BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

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—BY—

ALLEN DAVENPORT.

III.

THE ACTOR.

THE QUALITY OF HIS IMPORTANCE.

In the best type of American actor we find a person broad-minded, generous and charitable; of high intellect, becoming deportment and social import. He maintains with all a compliant nature, that attracts to him readily consequential men and women, ever demanding profit and entertainment from his companionship. In freely yielding to this condition, a serious devotion to a proper progression in his art must often necessarily be set aside, in surrendering to a few, the time, talents and nervous energy that should rather be constantly cared for, increased and expended on the many who make up the public to whom this actor must ever be a conscientious and faithful, albeit fearless, servant. It is in the condition of this type of actor — if self-devoted and determined to attain the highest approximate state of perfection in the pursuit of his art — that the American stage might easily claim, at least, a predictive condition of ex-

cellence, foretelling with great surety a future of exalted and permanent worth in the conduction of its truly useful and beneficial institution, the theatre.

There exists another type of actor in America. He emblemizes the quality shown in the vast multitude of vagrant incumbents lounging on the unsound, tinsel-frailty of an unseemly abuse of the institution and art, whose proper aims should rather stir them to an appreciation and effective use of the true resources and talents claiming a legitimate relation to the vocation that viciously they have slumped into. These men and women have no settled aim, no serious inclination. They entered into their calling with few natural attributes to recommend them, and they remain in it with few inclinations to pursue it, except to satisfy a mere sensual craving to be in it, and to enjoy the more or less unrestrained freedom and care-less companionship that such a general nomadic life affords, regardless, and at the expense, of any expenditure of energy, and concentrated application of thought, to utilize their idle moments, and "resting" respites, towards elevating their conditions both as actors and as men. To this type of actor it is considered time enough to study a part when he gets a chance to play it. Then when the chance comes, he is more intent on playing it first, and studying it afterwards (if, indeed, he does even then). To get work is his all-absorbing thought. To receive remuneration his all-important necessity. The means by which he is to attain these conditions, and the question as to his qualifications to rightfully assume the practice of the essential demands made upon him as an artist, are of minor importance or of no consideration whatsoever. The matter of art in the con-

cerns of his stage career is hopelessly immersed in the constant strife for remuneration and the sensual desire to satisfy that condition through the alluring channels of stage life. He does not know, nor would he have the patience to endure the fact, that, if he properly prepared for his art and honestly practised it, the remuneration would be finally and securely awarded. But the actor is not wholly to blame for this existing state of his condition.

With the exception of a few names essential to the furtherance of pecuniary gain, the manager of to-day selects his cast much after the manner that he does the scenery, properties and effects of the play he is about to produce. The owner, author, director, or all three (whoever has the say), generally interviews the actors and actresses,—after days, sometimes weeks and even months on their part, of patient, or impatient, waiting,—looks them over, so to speak, and if they realize in personal favor, voice, looks and shape, the part under consideration, the possession or no of histrionic art is a matter of little or no consequence. If the vocation of the stage is to be considered a profession and acting an art, who can justly deny that the existence of such a condition as has just herein been cited, is not truly deplorable and somewhat discouraging, and indeed needful of attempted adjustment at least?

To-day the actor or actress possessing the advantage of an inheritance through relationship to prominent and famous antecedents is bought and sold in theatrical trade merely on the strength of that inheritance. This is not only an injustice to many more deserving actors lacking such advantage, but also, in many cases, a great injury to the human property thus

bartered by the greed of theatrical speculation. The inherent talent in these actors and actresses would, if quietly awakened, carefully nurtured and sturdily matured, assure much hopeful expectancy for the best purposes of the stage and its future exaltation. But no,—they are thrust into the glare and focus of high lights, fitted, sometimes misfitted, with a vehicle to expose their personal charms of youth, decoying eccentricities of manner, and by the time that they should have quite securely moulded their art into a form that proper preparation, progression, study and experience might chisel into images of special beauty, they are too often left neglected by the traders who bartered them, and by the public whose senses then have become all too surfeited. Broken toys in a deserted corner of the playhouse.

The actor in America to-day (and there are very few exceptions, even amongst the so-called "big ones") endures more, fawns and cringes, sacrifices intellectuality, temperament, and even manhood, to obtain and hold his position, a thousand times more than he would in any other employment or vocation under the sun. Every manager knows this and makes advantage of it. He doesn't disguise the fact; the actor can't. The actor to-day is relegated to the manager's "prop" list merely. He commands respect only as regards his use and durability. The quality of his importance is estimated, and he is also subjected to the same abuse and censure, or attention and praise, in a like manner as are the inanimate properties purchased to adorn the stage. And yet this same actor too often waits upon the manager as no serf does upon his king. Why? Because the actor has little or no consideration for his art for its

own sake. He prefers to earn his living by following the stage. He lives in hope that some lucky strike is going to bring him at once fortune and perhaps fame, and thereby reverse the quality of his importance. He has no proper, healthy estimate of the profession he would be a part of. He doesn't know, he doesn't care, nor will he recognize, that the actor's vocation is a profession, the practice of it an art. To him it is a business first and last. He, too, is a speculator. He is in the same game with the manager, and shows his hand at every play. The fault is here,—the actor lacks ideals and a true spirit of emulation. He lives, almost always, alone for the momentary prospect of pecuniary gain; seldom for the growing, lasting attainment of art gain. By forfeiting a respect for his art and its ideals, and confessing a disregard for the true spirit of emulation, he forfeits the respect of all the conditions and stipulations that surround that art and might tend towards his benefit. He does not justly respect his own condition, and consequently neither challenges nor deserves respect from others.

In this fact (a lack of ideals and the true spirit of emulation), almost solely, I believe, lies the cause for the failure of self-maintenance of the Actors' Fund of America. Therein lies, I believe, the stigma that blinds the path that might otherwise light the unobstructed way to self-supporting permanency of the Actors' Fund of America. A state that would allow its charity to exist unheralded, and unaided by the public whose purse and patience are perhaps taxed quite enough already. The gentlemen officiating for that Fund are pre-eminently equipped to efficiently discharge its business functions. It appears

they do most thoroughly with tact and unselfish labor; but notwithstanding, the president of the Fund in his annual report of May, 1905, makes this statement: "The only relief we have recourse to, is through the help of the actors and actresses; if they will contribute their small annual payments, as members of the Fund, it will then be placed above want; but we must allow for a large percentage of falling off, and so I presume the officers will have to continue organizing benefits from year to year." This is a condition that has existed for many previous years, and bids fair to remain unaltered. Reflect on that condition confronting a board of direction, for the most part business managers who are giving serious, arduous labor in the cause of charity, to benefit the condition of that same actor to whom they pay also a salary. Managerial skill, business tact, has not supplied, nor does it seem likely to worthily furnish, the deficiency caused by the neglect and failing duty of the beneficiary,—the actor. And he is not miserly; he is almost always generous, helping, charitable if thrown into environments of immediate necessity. But he lacks ideals and the beautiful spirit of emulation. He vies with the manager for pecuniary gain. "I'm in the business for the money," says the actor. Not one in five hundred or more admits he is in it for anything else.

Acting is an art! An intellectual occupation! The actor should, first of all, live and work for his art. Pecuniary gain is the manager's need. He can't exhibit art without it. The actor who professes his art alone for the "money there is in it," has no honest claim to its possession. He has no right to remain and clog the mainspring of the true motive of the



theatre; the art expression of human types and ideas. Such a one should be excluded from it. His place belongs to him who appreciates, and desires to the more appreciate, the true beauties of his art. Then, if the remuneration do not follow, he has not failed; and there awaits ahead to receive him, a home. It is what he has striven to make it. And when he has gained that home, there should be one thought uppermost in his mind: "I earned this; it is mine by right."

A word concerning the instilling of idealism in the actor through emulation of the fittest of his own craft. I speak with no ill-disposed intent to assail and belie the stage, its institutions or its incumbents. There is a society in New York City, which, in its appellative significance, is all that might be desired to convey in a single thought its motive for existence. Nearly all of the most prominent personages inseparable from the stage of America to-day are members of this society. That is to say, they lend distinction to its roll-call. Some few are active and more or less earnest and devoted workers in its cause. But, — the great unswaying membership (albeit they may be good companions, honest fellows, willing givers) appear like the restless, drifting, unintentioned seafarer, unpurposed in the true significance that the practice of his craft implies. And so with this majority membership (pleasantly edging and elbowing each other in their endeavors to reach the newest favor, or present the latest grievance), what magnet anchor hove within their harborage makes them fast? A chance of pecuniary gain. A society whose banner is of such declaration as is theirs should be free from any semblance of pecuniary inducements. At

its head should jet its sternest life and richest endowments to spray with precept, example, helpfulness and fraternity its component members. To the public that honors such, is owed a loyalty, it is true; but to the profession (the distinguished part of which they are), to that profession which in claiming them makes it possible for that public to honor them, they owe much more, — a sacred duty to keep it beautiful! to banish from its altar every odor that might debasely infuse the actor's sense and art, and then to spread the incense of idealism through emulation, that it should arouse the brotherhood of actors in America to the highest sense of duty to the art that they are privileged to profess.

The spirit of charity would then be embodied in this fulfilment. It would need no urging. The opportunities to pursue one's art would appear from out this consummation without the sense of trade. There then would be an end to that unstable engaging agency, wavering (in its bid for patronage from manager and actor) on an uncertain balance, ready to shift its weight in that direction which may best fulfill the immediate prospect of its purposes, and insure some future favor. A vicious need, breeding and maintaining jealousy, partiality and a woful lack of self-reliance. In the practice of this medium is seen no proper spirit, no special attempt of an orderly, systematic and just disposal of positions to be filled. Here preferments often go to those unworthy, incompetent, inexperienced, but who, nevertheless, through bonds of affection, social ties and favoritism, must be advanced in spite of the lack of any real merit, and often to the sacrifice of experience, ability and rank. These agencies swarm with idlers, possessing

no higher estimate of the institution they lie in wait to inhabit, than that it may give them the temporary indulgence of work, and thus fixes upon it a common condition, putting it in the same category with the multifarious forms of servility, whose individuals, to find their medium of activity, seek registration in the employment bureau.

The Brotherhood of Actors and the Actors' Fund of America should constitute a stanch and firmly welded union of two distinct, and yet inseparable, co-operate factors. The former confronts the animate joy of daily strife to maintain both; it seeks rest, comfort and happiness in the companionship and care of the latter. But the latter cannot be idle! They must help each other if they would hope to properly sustain the desired object of their union,—a self-maintenance of their home, freed from any sense or necessity of charity. The actor, entering upon his career, should become a material individual embodiment of that idea.

Something concerning the base intrusions that enter unjustly upon the actors' domicile. We often hear a spectator viewing a play make some such comment as this: "Isn't that just like ——" (naming some distinctive type of countryman in a Northern, Eastern, Southern or Western district of our own land; or perhaps some character of foreign locality and extraction). Such a remark is a compliment to the artist simulating that special character. Except in very few instances, to replace that artistic exhibition by substituting the native product, untutored in the art of dramatic personation, is to mar, by its crude realism, the just simulation of the original, that only the able exponent of characterization and expression

can truthfully reveal. It cannot be denied that in some rare cases persons associated with incidents in real life and employed to reproduce them on the stage, possess a sufficient degree of histrionic ability to be moulded into an acceptable representation of the events thus transplacé; but such cases are rare. Yet to-day in America we find the actors' vocation confronted by many such instances as referred to above.

Thus, many individuals who have attained prominence through various channels of notoriety,—by fistic skill, social scandal, sensational escapades, and many other means,—are sought and approached by managers who employ a certain crew of sensational playwrights, for the mere purpose of the base advantage that such irregular practices present for immediate theatrical speculation. Some of the notoriety thus bargained for may find in its committer a certain amount of native talent for the stage; enough to justify its use as a medium to transplace from life to mimicry the original participant and events transpired. Origin nor position should never prejudice promoter nor spectator, provided the incumbent is truly gifted with the attributes essential to an adequate exhibition, and if he has been properly educated to their most fitting use. But this condition is not often found. The exponent of such exhibitions as we have just referred to, is too often a person ill-mannered, uncouth, unlearned and unfit generally to be precipitated upon the scenes of an institution whose exponents should ever be men and women properly prepared and seriously inclined to promote at all times and to the end, the best purposes of the high mission it sets forth. The playwright who will hew and build out of, and around, such pulpous

material is a menace to society, as is the manager who exhibits it. As to the actors who engage in such brainless eruption, it would be wiser if they sought the field to till and hoe, than to become immersed in obscure publicity under the deluge of such lavarous verbosity.

It is not necessary to turn to the many apt illustrations of this abuse of the actor's art that constantly substantiate the truth of the foregoing remarks; but I am going to add a brief illustrative mention of the greediness of some managers to seize upon every opportunity of a possible enrichment of their treasury, regardless of the more lasting policy of encouragement to the highest degree of the vocations of playwright and actor. This avariciousness is generally cloaked in the disguise of "realistic touches."

Not very long ago a genial citizen, a humble layman (one who for nearly half a century was a loyal retainer and warm-hearted enthusiast of the thousands of men who have entered and pursued one of the highest institutions of learning in the world), was dissuaded, so it was reported, from the intercessions of endeared relationship by the selfish interests of theatrical venture, and was dragged from the natural stage of his simple triumphs, the truly realistic scene wherein he trod, to lend an unaffected touch of realism to an environment of artificial resemblance. Dazed by the glare of unreality, this merry old character who had had so unwisely forced upon him this strangeness, therein failed as totally as he had theretofore triumphed in the daily scenes of his untutored practice. Such a character developed and subjected to the art of simulation could not fail to obtain recognition by its introduction, if not in the vital motive of the play,

at least as an episodical adjunct. The manager placing upon the stage such incongruity is either ignorant of his obligation to the institution he would promote, or wilfully unheedful of its best protection, and of his proper duty to the actor in a just regard for the maintenance of the true quality of his importance. But not until the individual actor is brought to a fitting realization of his true quality of importance, and worthily adheres to it, can he ever expect to be highly judged and approved by others.

I am the actor's friend, always; but not often his sympathizer. To benefit his condition or his art tending towards high ideals and attainment, I would unceasingly bend my best endeavor, tire and wear every nerve in my body. In such devotion rests the idealism and true spirit of emulation that would embody in its own truth the fixed and lasting charge of the Actors' Fund of America. Optimism should be our faith, idealism our hope; the path we trudge to deserve these, — charity!

Number Four of "Stage Affairs," appearing February 5, 1907, concerns:

THE STAGE MANAGER,

HIS DECAYING POWER.

FEB 14 1907

A series of fifteen pamphlets issued weekly on Tuesdays
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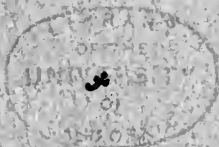
NUMBER FOUR

FEBRUARY 5, 1907

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BY

ALLEN DAVENPORT



BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

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IV.

THE STAGE MANAGER.

HIS DECAYING POWER.

Except in a few rare instances, the stage manager of to-day (as that title is generally understood) is too often a person of small knowledge, less culture, little experience and weak ability when compared to what a proper estimate of that position should be and the positive qualities that its incumbent should possess. For this office (the undisputed executive head of the stage department of the theatre) should be selected a gentleman of sufficient years, experience, ability, learning and culture to at once command and hold the respect and concurrent obedience of all his co-laborers. While the stage manager, in the promulgation of his ideas and theories, and in an insistent exaction of a faithful practice of them, should always stand firm in the courage of his convictions, at the same time this condition should always be established and maintained through the legitimate outgrowth of requisite qualities (the possession of which

has gained for him his position), and never a mere assertion of his ideas, and, whether right or wrong, a rude enforcement of obedience through arrogant autocracy.

The stage manager should judiciously and with artistic discernment exercise the firm hand that distributes, develops and harmonizes the colors that have been selected for the picture. But he should never presume to make nor correct the substance of that color. Like the painter and the sculptor, he should select only properly prepared mediums, substantial colors and perfect forms, with which to animate his canvas or his marble. If the mediums through which he must work are inefficient and imperfect, he should cast them aside, and substitute others that are genuine. To attempt to make the former more fitting, or to correct their inefficiency, is not within the province of the stage manager. Unlearned and incompetent as he too often is in a proper distribution, development and harmonization — in an efficient handling — of the material, in the use of which he should otherwise be a master, for him to try to outstrip such ignorance by a presumptuous attempt to temper and improve the medium at his command, even if that medium be not efficient itself, is but to hinder and destroy any natural genuineness that its crudity may possess, and thereby render it far more unserviceable than originally found.

The stage manager should be the commissioned officer over trained soldiers; the accomplished conductor leading skilled instrumentalists. His care is the attainment of the nearest point to perfection in the ensemble. While he may suggest, and further enforce, a different rendering of some one part, at

variance with the instrumentalist's own conception, but done to more fully effect an harmonious whole, still it would be unpardonable effrontery to attempt to teach that artist how to play his instrument. He may discharge him if he is incompetent; but he must not rob him of that possession acquired through preparation, study and finish that has gained him the right to perform as a skilled part of the whole company, and bespeaks him an artist. But therein, lamentable though it be, lies the strongest weapon of defence in possession of a certain class of over-riding stage managers of to-day.

The actor suffers from such because in America there is no adequate medium of instruction in the art of acting of sufficient continuance in systematic training, or a proper condition of final judgment as to a competency of whether or no one may be allowed to rightfully profess the practice of the art of acting. In the absence of any such criterion the stage manager too often insists upon an automatic imitation of his own ignorance, mannerisms, limitations and pretence. But as this is generally done in the service, and under full sanction of some one still more utterly void of any sense of artistic proportions, the "bluff" goes, and the actor, even though he be possessed of infinitely more skill and taste than the awkward automaton he is made to copy, must surrender his intelligence, experience, and often his accomplished art to this person, who, in his desire to "make good" with the individual or company engaging him, ruthlessly unheeds the actor's superior ability, temperament and sensitiveness, and often jeopardizes any chance of artistic, and sometimes financial, success by the brazen enforcement of his charlatanical direction. Of course,

there is the other side to the question, but regarding the actor and his art I shall write at length in later chapters of this volume; let us here consider further the subject of the stage manager of to-day, his consequence, or, rather, inconsequence, as regards the general aspect of his office at the present time.

A company is organized and a play put in rehearsal under the supervision of a director, producer, actor-manager, or whatever he may be called. There has been engaged for the company a stage manager. Many times the "business" and "situations" of this play have been carefully thought out and arranged beforehand, and are subjected to few alterations during the progress of rehearsals. Many more times the play undergoes innumerable changes from first to final rehearsal. Sometimes, but not often, a play is, to a very great extent, staged by the intuitive instinct and impressionable imagination of the one in authority. This is rare, and, of course, hazardous and uncertain, but such cases have existed. During these rehearsals, the stage manager sits humbly at the supervisor's desk, manuscript in hand, altering the text here and there, changing "business," making notes of effects to be used and attended to "off stage," taking instructions and orders from the director concerning various matters, and when the actors have become "rough perfect," that is, have laid aside their parts, he facilitates progress by prompting them in their lines. He has observed the situations entailing the use of music and made himself acquainted with the curtain cues. In the management of many of these various duties he is obliged to, and does, when the regular performances have commenced, solicit the assistance of actors not on the stage engaging in the scene, and also the ser-

vices of the mechanics employed by the management of the company. Of course, this is absolutely necessary in all companies of any distinction at all. The stage manager often acts a part in the play; sometimes more than one, in theatrical parlance known as a "double." He assigns the dressing-rooms to the members of the company, and when a musical director is not employed by the company travelling, instructs the resident orchestra concerning the music used in the play.

All these duties in themselves, independent of the task of directing the preliminary rehearsals, are arduous, important and responsible ones, and when faithfully and devotedly performed worthy of deep respect and sufficient remuneration; and it is fitting that they should be incumbent on no inexperienced, unable, non-esteemed person. That they too often are is a condition in stage affairs to-day that is truly deplorable. The company opens its season. The one who has superintended the rehearsals generally goes along with the company until the play is running smoothly. At the end of that time the entire management of the stage is surrendered to the one regularly appointed to that position, the subject of our discussion in this chapter. In some instances we find a man sufficiently experienced, able, courteous, tactful and justly authoritative to gain at once obedience and commendation from the entire company. Such is a happy state indeed. But unfortunately this condition is rare, for too often this stage manager becomes the mean serving man of the business representative, the star, a relative, or some other one or two members of the company whose mean flatteries have readily swayed his meaner sense of equity. Or perhaps some one whose commer-

cial value has been particularly impressed upon him by the owners of the theatrical vehicle or combination in question, and to whom, in his total lack and disregard of any sense of justice or adequate possession of either stamina or intelligence, he equally fawns in mean design for personal aggrandizement. His conduct soon becomes a hindrance to honest endeavor and artistic purpose; an outrage on decency and manhood, and a base mockery to the highest meant significance that his title proclaims. To enumerate the countless ways that such a person may assume, in arrogant charlatantry and rank disposition, the duties of his office, would be a useless expenditure of time and to no profit in any direction whatsoever; but a general outline of such a one's duties, and his usual unfitness for them as contrasted to the highest results possible in an able conduction of them by a worthy incumbent, will not be superficial at this point of our endeavor to place simple facts and plain truths before our readers.

Nearly every company of any importance carries its own scenery. It is in the care and direction of a carpenter as regards its transportation and the process of setting and "striking"; that is, taking down and removing one scene preparatory to putting another in its place. The carpenter is under the jurisdiction of the stage manager as regards what shall be used in the setting of the stage, and in the distribution of the properties employed in the conduction of the scene. Once this information has been imparted and firmly settled upon, so long as the carpenter performs his work properly, the position allows of no interference, nor will its holder permit of any presumptuous instruction by the stage manager in the

discharge of his duties. It is so with all the mechanical departments of the theatre. That is right, and so long as the heads of these departments are men of serious purpose and mind their own affairs, and do not exert unwarranted officiousness in the discharge of their duties, and the stage manager is equally mindful of the proper conduction of his office, there is no trouble. This fitting balance is most desirable. But when it is wanting, the condition arising is most annoying.

Right here I wish to state that I believe in organized labor when done for the purpose of self-improvement amongst its individuals, and to maintain a rightful claim for protection against indifferent appreciation and ill-sufficient wages, and with the show of a respectful spirit of cheerful compliance with any sensible adjustment of differences that may arise from time to time between employer and employee. But for the union of organized labor engendered in the undue influence exercised by some too ambitious leaders, misunderstanding and often unheeding the fact that in all human strife there must ever exist an inequality in the distribution of worldly possessions, and not knowing, acknowledging nor striving to attain those attributes of character and gained understanding that would establish sooner any desired approximation to a genuine condition of social equality than the ready acceptance of unweighed vaunting, and in this misunderstanding suffering no thought nor reason to invade his mind to temper any sense of fancied injustice, and in his ignorant obstinacy ruthlessly stagnating the industry of another, perhaps at the peril of lives, and at last finding himself alone the greatest sufferer, — for such a union of organized labor, all

privileges of press and public, and high enforcement of law and order should speak out in unmistakable words of unretractable detestation.

It is not my purpose herein to fix in the mind of any reader the germ of anticipate disturbance foretelling eventual harmfulness to the best interests of the theatre. To the contrary, I would commend, in its main effectualness, the well-directed forces of the organized body of theatrical mechanics, and in the highest honesty of my deep devotion to the theatre entreat its followers to labor ever for the condition of harmony in their co-operate skill in embellishing the beautiful designs of the institution in which at the present day they play so prominent a part. It is with a desire to see this condition carefully preserved, that herein I would entreat this necessary adjunct to the highest development of the theatre to guard against and crush any evident and growing spirit of indifference to the attainment of best results by an over-zealous adherence to the too often unjust demands of the unionism of organized labor, albeit a sense of honest belief may pervade its unenlightened direction.

To-day when mechanical ingenuity in its varied forms, and "sensational features" dependent on the skill and dexterity of the mechanics furnishing and effecting them, play so important a part in the preparation and exhibition of a theatrical vehicle, and which are selected in many cases with greater care and labor than the artists to be employed in the revealing of the author's diction, it is not hard to understand that such responsibility, falling upon men saturated with the boisterous clamor of their associate constituency, should often lead to a condition of indiscreet conten-

tion and unmerited importance. At this juncture is most needed the presence of the stage manager in possession of the truly high qualities essential to the distinction of his office, encouraged and upheld by the business representative in whose hands is placed the protection of the property thus jeopardized. But it is seldom that either of the last mentioned two conditions is apparent.

The stage manager of to-day is in quality of service hardly more than a mechanic in degree of dignity as concerns the routine of his office. It may be truly said that the office often proves an immediate line of promotion from the grade of mechanic; for it exists to-day a trust of no real distinction in the direction of artistic accomplishment requiring exceptional intelligence, talent and refinement. The mechanic has at least served an apprenticeship, and in so far as his duties may extend is truly a skilled artisan. And so to-day instead of finding a man equal or superior to his environments in knowledge and culture, we too often endure a person lacking in all the essentials necessary to the proper solicitation of command, obedience and esteem from those over whom he is placed in authority. His views of the institution that sustains him, and of the profession for which he clamors pretended favor, seldom rise above a common understanding shared by the vast majority wavering on an indivisible condition that immerses in its nameless vapidness, the widely marked difference of the contradistinctive titles,—artist and artisan,—and that readily applies to every phase and promotive project of the theatre, the common term—business.

Thus, the actor of to-day, striving for anything high in the designs of the theatre, filled with a desire to

labor in a field of artistic endeavor, serious, studious and justly ambitious, is often overridden, unjustly censured, and many times openly insulted by this whiffling autocrat, void of any sense of justice or proper manhood, and totally incapable of, and indifferent to, any just appreciation of tact or discernment which might enable him to separate and properly estimate in individual effort the opposite qualities, — reality of purpose, and falsity of pretence, — and duly reward the one and rebuke the other. The petty indignities suffered through the injustice of many so-called stage managers, such as the imprudent distribution of dressing rooms and the attendant abuses, the evident partialities, the insults and rebukes publicly posted on the call boards of the visited theatre, and many other injuries inflicted by these busy officials, are too contemptuously distasteful to warrant the waste of a particle of ink. Often he gradually shifts many of the most irksome duties on to an assistant, and not infrequently to the property man of the company. Many times the transplacing of this power into such irrational, inexperienced channels, augments and aggravates the more the already too unbearable condition of abused trust.

A few years ago an actor of nearly sixty years' service on the stage (a creator of parts through forty years of New York reputation) was interrupted and reprimanded at a rehearsal most insultingly (by one of this class of stage managers) for an insignificant, inconsequential matter that bore no relation to any possible detriment to the play, nor author's intention of the part, that later was to be so masterly interpreted by this gentlemanly and finished old actor. The owner of the play confessed that this stage manager was

engaged solely through the astonishing ability he displayed in organizing and managing the stage departments of numerous amateur companies in a large theatrical centre. Among amateurs of any consequence at all, there exists an undeniable acumen, coupled with superior intelligence, culture and refinement that is sadly lacking in the average condition of the professional actor in America to-day, whose only grace is in the advantage of repeated performances which lend finally a desirable smoothness and finish. The amateur is afforded no such opportunity. It is not a surprising feat to guarantee a commendable performance by intelligent amateurs. The professional coach feels the superior environments surrounding the best amateur organizations. He dares not inflict upon these ladies and gentlemen the offences he unmitigatingly commits when succumbing to the condition of professionalism in stage affairs in America to-day. The reason is only too palpable. The general average status of the actor to-day does not compel his best deportment and manners, and he furthermore has not that just appreciation of tact and discernment to intelligently distinguish of their separate qualities.

Stage affairs in America to-day make it possible for a man to remain permanently in a large theatrical centre and superintend the production of plays alone. A few men do this work sufficiently well to win the encomiums of managers by supplying in the place of methodical arrangement, sane evolvment, logical development and artistic finish, a feverish tension of capricious ideas and whimsical actions; or by furnishing mean copies of indifferent originals. But most often the material furnished them is as feeble and inane as its producing agency. Anything of intrinsic

literary worth and high dramatic possibilities placed in such hands exposes at once their general unfitness for the sterling qualities of the position. It is through the encouragement to-day by monopolistic theatrical venture of this dualistic condition of inferior matter and inadequate producers that the high office of stage manager is now very nearly a lost power.

It is agreeable and of ready willingness to state, that during the past few seasons there has been installed in the office of general stage director, by one of the controlling powers of theatrical speculation, a man who is all that could be desired for the discharge of the true functions of the office of stage manager. Possessing the qualifications and superior talent essential to the best execution of such a position; trained and prepared in all the fitting and appropriate branches of the drama from its most classic form, standard models, highest comedy, to the lightest texture of farce; associated from his earliest theatrical life with the best tradition and experience could offer. Were the power through which he operates heedful or provident of the highest mission of the theatre, and this gentleman as faithful still to his ideals, the adherence to which has hitherto gained for him his distinction and maintenance, what a strife for good in stage affairs in America to-day might ensue! But judging by the few years through which this stipulation has worked, we can discern no ray of light that would herald a belief that the dawn that follows would spread into any bright day of glorious future for the best desired ends of the drama. We can not but believe that this adjunctive agent has been encased in the cogs of this great wheel (the power of whose machinery turns out drama as the mills the paper and

ink that sketch it), and that he has succumbed to the inevitable weakness that draws all minor factors into this to-day's common whirl of commercial greediness.

Call him what you will, — manager, director, supervisor, or any significant title, — it is not the mere nominal stipulation we would correct, but the constantly degenerating condition that is endangering a proper authority and essential dignity in the vital force of the stage department of the institution of the theatre. It is between the highest development of this force and the ablest endeavors through honesty and integrity of business efficacy that the just balance of theatrical exposition should ever swing.

Number Five of "Stage Affairs," appearing February 12, 1907, concerns:

THE THEATRE ORCHESTRA

ITS ENFORCED PROTRUSIVE OBEDIENCE.



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BY

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Power.

Stage Affairs in America Today.

—BY—

ALLEN DAVENPORT.

V.

THE THEATRE ORCHESTRA.

ITS ENFORCED PROTRUSIVE OBEDIENCE.

The theatre orchestra, under the leadership of a skilled, earnest and experienced director, is a most necessary and powerful adjunct towards the attainment of high results in the conduction of a theatre and its stage performances, and when its members are truly proficient and attentive to the proper discharge of their duties, they should at all times command the respect, sympathy and support of both business and stage authorities front and back of the curtain line. In all theatres of any distinction whatsoever, the orchestras are composed of instrumentalists who may with justification lay honest claim to the title — artist. These musicians have prepared, progressed and perfected their special art to that degree that truly entitles them to rightfully profess and practice it. Such attainment has been at the expense of many years of labor and a liberal expenditure of money. Truly, in an impartial estimate, can this be

rightfully said of at least nine-tenths of the actors in America today who are clamoring for place and recognition in the predominant element of the stage — the play?

Just so long as the musician properly maintains his special function, he should be held in proper dignity, consideration and credence. But the music should not, however, be any more than an adjunctive force, subservient to, augmenting and embellishing the chief feature of the theatre — the play. As such it is an important factor, and may readily add to, or detract from the general value of a play (according to the measure of its importance) by the congruity or incongruity of its connection, by a complementary or insufficient condition of instruments, and by the adequacy or insufficiency of its rendition. Too little importance is placed upon the condition of music in theatres in America today! Too little regard is shown for its congruity, completeness and adequacy as a necessary auxiliary for a better furtherance of the play. There are a few theatres where these conditions approximate satisfaction, and some travelling combinations worthily adhere to a high standard in the employment of music as an embellishment to the play, but with the great majority of managements the best functions of the orchestra are seriously impaired by an enforced protrusive obedience to the demands of the authorities in their estimate as to what the play requires and the public wants.

The theatre orchestra of today too often forsakes its proper office of graceful subserviency to vie with the predominant factor of the theatre, the play, in its contribution to the evening's entertainment. This is

true of orchestras in theatres of first-class distinction. Doubtless there are instances when both the material offered, and the quality of its rendition by the musicians surpasses in point of genuine merit that of the play and players. But the fact that the orchestra sometimes so outbids the stage performance in its intentional appeal for public approval, does not rightfully warrant a wilful usurpation of its proper uses, nor an insistent firmness on the part of the authorities in front to encourage and maintain such pleasing impudence. In my observance of stage affairs, I have seen few instances where any direct blame for the existence of the above-mentioned condition could be charged to the leader of the orchestra.

If appropriate entr'acte numbers have not been provided by the visiting company, the resident leader must select his own programme. And often in so doing he is instructed to play something lively between the acts; something to "wake 'em up." Consequently it is no uncommon occurrence to hear immediately before some act of serious import, religious solemnity or tragic awfulness, a potpourri of "popular airs" with a grand finish by the dexterous skill of the artist on the vulgarly pleasing xylophone, with the unescapable encore or two. It is a fact which cannot be gainsaid that renditions of that calibre are never rudely interrupted in an impatient desire to begin the next act. They are often highly enjoyed and appreciated even by the artistic authority who flashes the footlights, and who, at other times, cuts short at a most inappropriate measure some highly ambitious and worthy rendering by the musicians of the theatre, who in turn are often called upon to fill

in some tedious wait, which, although often unavoidable, is frequently occasioned by the irregular, untactful and self-centred practises of discontented, despotic and vainglorious stars and stage managers. To this duty the artists of the orchestra gracefully and otherwise comply.

But there is a palpable indiscretion and inexcusable offence habitually committed by the musicians of the theatre orchestra which is as unpardonable, and in view of the acknowledged condition of its subserviency to that of the player, more to be censured than any infringement made by the latter on the rights of the musician. I refer to the disrespectful and annoying custom of the musician in abruptly and unceremoniously leaving and returning to his desk during the progress and action of the play. It is often done at most inopportune moments, and with utter disregard and inconsideration for the actor. And no doubt to the small annoyance of the nearest auditors. His eagerness to seek the relaxation that the music room affords is equally as precipitate as is his hurried tardiness in resuming his desk, arranging his light and music, picking up his instrument, and as abruptly and unceremoniously resuming his task as he had left off with it. During the progress of the play, when not engaged in the performance of his duty, the musician's condition should be that of passive subordinacy.

I do not believe in the custom of orchestral selections between the acts of a play, and most especially when they partake of the wildest forms of incongruity, and ambitious proportions entirely out of all possibilities of the limited and meagre distribution of instruments. If a play be worthy of any consideration,

fitting music should be employed to truly embellish and beautify its theme and variations; and an orchestra of sufficient numbers and individual proficiency should be engaged to properly render its highest significance. And I believe that the functions of such an organization should be completely entrusted to the discernment of some capable leader, with untampered authority to adjust or augment the condition of his band to the highest requirements of the music to be employed. I believe in an appropriate overture to the play; fitting preludes to its acts; characteristic meaning and coloring to the incidental employment of music, and a foretelling suggestion, in the antecedent finales, prophetic of the catastrophe of the play; and then following, a subsequent condition of appropriateness in the arrangement of music that may serve the purposes of a postlude to a fitting finale in the musical accompaniment of the play. The intermission between the acts should be given over to a discussion of the play and players (or to such conversation as the auditor chooses).

Today the rude indifference to the serious efforts of the theatre orchestra between the acts is a mockery to its best intentioned purpose. Its present condition satisfies neither critical nor uncritical. Its proper functions are ignored and abused; and its condition of forced irrelevancy to the motive and action of the play makes it an adjunct more fittingly to be dispensed with by managers and actors of any sense of just proportions in dramatic exhibitions, than a worthy factor of embellishing import, indispensable to the highest designs of the play, and the natural medium of expression to keep in unbroken, harmonious continuity

its predominant theme. Today when all conditions tend towards marked and increasing facility in dexterously setting and "striking" the scenery, there is no excuse for long waits between the acts. There should be a decided tendency to shorten them, and by the assistance of fitting music, to more closely connect the incidents of the preceding act to that which is to follow, and so to neatly dovetail each separate part into one harmonious entirety. We should banish from further chance the unfair methods of the manager to eke out, by such protracted waits, an ordinary performance of an all too evident condition of briefness in his play. By dispensing with the long-established custom of an orchestral number, and to adhere instead to a reasonable degree of brevity, would stir the stage folk to the necessity of abandoning many whims and vanities, ill-moods and tempers that find an outlet in the abuse of the "between-acts" respite. And still further, it would encourage to better effort the working staff of the theatre, who often are censured for inactivity, but seldom considered when made to wait upon the idiosyncrasies of the sometime erratic stage folk.

I believe that the manager and actor owe to the public a proper adjustment of this condition of "stage wait." No longer should the orchestra be made the compellent go-between, in allaying this imposition by the interpolation of unsuitable selections, often to be briefly cut short without consideration or consistency. Exalt the music of the theatre and put it to some genuine worth! Maintain in the orchestra a complement of instruments that shall adequately and with congruity assist to preserve the continuity of the play

and enhance its worth. Its general purposes now as a divertisement to the play seem as incongruous and prodigal as would the introduction of miscellaneous readings by a band of elocutionists between the acts of an opera performance for the mere sake of variety. If opera managements can approximately control the "stage wait," dramatic authorities should be able to do likewise.

The orchestra should occupy its present location in the theatre, but be sunk lower, and obscured from the audience by a portable partition, oval shape, rising from its outer floor border, and curving until it meet and join the level of the stage, where apertures should be supplied, immediately front and back of the foot-lights, to sufficiently convey the volume of tone necessary to the demands of dramatic effectualness. A code of incandescent light signals governing the cues (red for "warning," white to "take up," and blue to "leave off," with speaking wire for accompanying instructions as to tempi and other varying music forms) should be established between the stage manager and orchestra leader. That is all stage detail, and should be placed in the responsible care of its proper authority. The vicious custom of "flashing the foots," and sometimes audibly instructing the leader from the stage, should be totally eliminated. Any vocal selection employed in the action of a drama should find its accompaniment in the environments of the stage scene wherein it is introduced. In the event of opera performances, this portable partition could readily be removed to preserve the essential relation between conductor and singer, and to give full scope to the predominant element of all genuine opera, — its

music, as heard through the art of composer, singer and musician, to which must ever remain in subservience the necessary adjunctive elements of dramatic action and stage display. The manager makes no hesitancy in placing the orchestra under the stage to add a few miserly dollars to his treasury when extraordinary business is being enjoyed. Why not do it for all time, and do it *right*? As the orchestra is arranged now, more tact should be used in arranging the music of the play, or the leader be empowered to engage extra musicians when music is to be employed both front and back during the progress of any one act in the play. As it exists now, it remains a custom impolite, clumsy, and disturbing, and the orchestra in the foreground is a blemish to the highest approximate attainment of illusiveness in the stage picture, claiming as it does the fencible ground, that must of its slightly importance, arrest a complete visual access to the play.

The exhibition and maintenance of rational musical entertainment, as a balance to dramatic divertisement, is as desirable and needful to a healthy condition of the theatre, and a counteractive benefit to the community, as is the reciprocal wise distribution of sunshine and rain to the land and its inhabitants. But an over-oppressiveness of either is, beyond argument, injurious, and when that oppression partakes of a lavatarous form of severity, it is dangerous, and often deadly. The stage today sizzles with lavatarous musical matter. It is alive with disordered precipitantness from unaccountable sources. There should be a standard of special qualification required of the composers and interpreters of musical entertainment. Today it is, for

the most part, in the hands of empiricism. Composers, singers, actors and conductors alike. There are, of course, a few exponents of these vocations, particularly in the cases of composer and conductor, who find justly merited recognition and employment for their skill; but the general condition of vocal and comedy effort is in a very distorted state of impoverishment. The condition of the material they labor to interpret is partly to blame for this. There are numerous concocters of these so-called musical comedies, posing as composers, with no fundamental knowledge of lyrical or musical composition, or an ability even to write on the stave a simple melody (sometimes not even with the aid of an instrument). He must seek the services of a trained musician. Although there are still many capable conductors being maintained by first-class managers, there are nevertheless many who can claim no more right to their position than an incomplete knowledge of the technique of the piano might grant them. And yet such boldly presume to train singers and direct skilled musicians. And all these conditions find favor and encouragement with the theatrical speculator. This state of affairs can not be corrected until the manager assumes his trust honestly, and admits of no solicitations to his offices that have not qualified for their separate arts. How can there be rational musical entertainment and light opera when the arts of composer and singer (their predominant forces) are usurped by the charlatantry of unqualified substitution, and the comedy supplied mostly through the mediums of freakishness, vocal and acrobatic contortion, coarseness and impossible dialects? The only intrinsic conditions that keep such a flimsy *melange*

from hopeless disjointment are the qualified arts of musician, scene painter and skilled mechanic. The theatre today is indeed a "show business."

In concluding this chapter I mention briefly a condition existing in the fraternal body of musicians which threatens to impede and stay the best aims of its individuals, and through such enforced stagnancy, must slowly, but constantly, corrupt the entire body. The musician of the theatre today, be he of mediocre quality or of superior worth in the exhibition of his art, is seized, held and driven by the despotic hand and lash of unionism. He may be of exceptional merit, and most essential to a high order of music in the theatre, and still be held momentarily subject to the arrogant dictatorship of a man many degrees his inferior, but possessed of the power to jeopardize another's living by an unreasonable enforcement of this power, thus compromising the other's standing, restricting the freedom of his art, and placing upon the finer vocation of the musician the same menial condition of dependency and subserviency in common with many lower and coarser fields of labor, whose ranks are mostly filled with unfortunate men, ignorant of the flimsiness of the standard they are following, and stubborn in their determination to remain thus unenlightened. The musician can never expect to find in the honest promoter and patron of art, just appreciation, sympathy and support, so long as he binds himself to the fetters of narrow dictation which seeks to unjustly interrupt and restrict the privileges, practices and freedom of his art. Such a condition can react but temporarily to the embarrassment, inconvenience and injury of that same promoter and patron,

— the benefactors of the individual submitting to such injudicious jurisdiction of salaried meddlers. The subject of such gullibility loses most, and often all. A man becomes but an ass in leading-strings in giving heed to such impromptu knavery. He is unworthy to adorn any art, especially one whose sphere of activity is universal, and in the proper devotion and practice of which his own self-reliant and individual worthiness alone should control the highest and wisest desire for the exercise of its proper functions.

Number Six of "Stage Affairs," appearing February 19, 1907, concerns:

THE DRAMATIC CRITIC.

THE RIGHTFUL CENSOR; BUT NOT MERELY BY "COURTESY OF THE THEATRE."

A series of ten pamphlets issued weekly on Tuesdays
from January 15 to April 23, inclusive

NUMBER SIX

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—BY—

ALLEN DAVENPORT.

VI.

THE DRAMATIC CRITIC.

THE RIGHTFUL CENSOR; BUT NOT MERELY BY THE
“COURTESY OF THE THEATRE.”

The very speculative nature of the theatre in its public appeal for patronage is, of that fact alone, warrant enough for the imperative need of an established safeguard against imposture, impropriety, and impureness. The appointing of a censor through municipal preferment is not, in this country at least, either wise or practical. No other petty practice so quickly unhinges judgment, equitableness and duty, as that of permitting free access to the environments of the theatre, and the influences of its people. In many theatres scattered throughout America, the city or town authorities are still allowed the privilege of free admission to its amusement places; and it is in readily granting such privilege that the local manager finds his aptest license to exhibit his wares. Although there might be found many men who would

with unswerving duty, equity and wisdom fulfil with sound proficiency the office of public censor in the affairs of the theatre, notwithstanding, the same spirit of leniency, readily acquiescent to the environments of the stage, would be liable to invite unwise practice, perhaps to a dangerous degree, in the trust of a regularly appointed censor to the theatre. This disposition is apparent in many instances concerning the charge of the dramatic critic; for frequently he becomes such merely "by courtesy of the theatre." Nevertheless, the genuine dramatic critic,—that reliable, worthy and much to be respected criterion, a person fearless, catholic and impartial in the art of criticism, one upon whose judgment we may rest reasonably secure in any subsequent inclination to wisely regulate our decisions,—such an one is, and ever should be (by every sense of a personal fitness, and the publicity that his station contains) the people's rightful censor. But he should be free from any bond of qualified courteous solicitation; and the organ that instates him should hold no covetous concernment of mere advertising gainfulness.

Viewed in a broad, general sense, the condition of dramatic art in America today, as regards both writing and acting, is truly,

“an unweeded garden,

. . . things *rank* and *gross* in nature

Possess it merely.”

Doubtless there are writers who might accomplish worthy things if made free and encouraged to reveal their highest flights of mental imagery. Some actors there are today battling against almost insurmountable barriers to maintain a well established

standard of artistic endeavor ; but generally considered, all conditions of art aim in the theatre in America today are immersed in the irresistible, potent whirlpool of commercialism. Consequently it is not strange that the art of dramatic criticism, (bearing as it does in the administration of its offices, a signal power towards the furtherance or restriction of the condition of the art it seeks to exalt and adjust), should feel the rotary force of this vortical authority, which, in the compellent nature of its abnormal supremacy, must as readily engulf all subservient conditions.

Dramatic criticism has been helplessly slumping into mere journalism. The desirable services of the able and accomplished writer of critical review is more and more each day giving place to the arrogant demand for the unenlightened, complaisant notice of the versatile journalist. Two reasons in the main are responsible for this alarming condition. First, the abnormal development of monopolistic venture, in its enormous controlment demands the necessity of abnormally regulating and controlling the mediums, which, in their normal functions, stand a menace to the despotic, irregular practices of monopolists, whose energies are impelled solely by the force of commercialism. And in the second place, through the increasing disinclination of able writers towards serious comment, not only through a manifest growing indifference and abuse of its office, (jeopardizing its dignity and worthiness), but also because of the feeble and inconsequential matter promoted by this state of monopoly, and a consequent decadent condition of the vocation of the necessary exposition of such material, —the actor.

If there is no special worth in the matter under consideration, then is there all the more need of the critic. But it is in the exhibition of such doubtful stuff that the manager must exercise his ablest powers of advertising skill and press work. He must pay well to advertise such wares. In return he demands said — the truth, if compatible with commercial interests, if not, something that at least will not impair the marketable prospects of the material in question. This condition allowed, the critic's mission ceases. He who would yield to this stipulation proclaims himself a paid hireling to maintain merely an established vicious policy; a condition that of course endangers his worthy office, admitting his surrender to any just claim of independent thought and action, qualities that the exaltedness of his trust should ever hold.

Not even under such conditions should we blame the public that it still is persistent in a liberal patronage. Of all factors swaying the theatre it is the least and last to be censured. It is the outward visible condition of the theatre that ever confronts it, and whatsoever the promoters choose to have that condition, good, bad or indifferent, the great multitude will ever voluntarily seek. The public is truly faithful and indulgent. More so to the theatre than anything else that solicits a measure of their earnings. In buying merchandise and finding imperfections, a remittance is asked, or equivalent demanded, and it is invariably allowed. Theatrical material today is mostly mere merchandise; but there is no substantial means of reparation for its imperfections and unsatisfactory interpretations. But the true condition of the critic, if firmly re-instated and upheld, might fur-

nish a safeguard against any unwise investment, if this public would but seize, respect and obey it! Establish a confiding disposition to hear and heed—the critic, the rightful censor, and thereby compel the manager to shield himself behind that barrier he oftentimes ventures to assail. Oblige him to say, “The critics of the press told you what we had, why didn’t you keep away?” But no, the manager invites your confidence, imposes upon your indulgence and faithfulness, and tells you that the critic doesn’t know; he bars him from his theatre; he appears before his curtain and assails him. Whom is the public to believe? The total non-existence of the former, or a desire on the managers’ part to respect any such condition, (even did it exist), but rather to completely remove it, conduces and viciously prompts the defiant spirit displayed in the latter. The same force that seizes upon and controls all conditions of the theatre, the monopolistic force of commercialism, also sways and controls the instrument through which the critic must operate—the great news organs of the day. There the condition of criticism, generally speaking, waits upon, and is subservient to, the same policy that in common importance sways the general trend of the news organ of which it is a part

Today in the great daily newspapers, we can read with naked eye from across the street, the “horrors” of the hour. We too often strain our eyes and repair to strong lenses to find the “beautiful” things. It is no exaggeration to say, that often, in looking upon a single page of a newspaper, we might see, at one gaze, the pictures of two men, one perhaps the likeness of a newly installed clergyman of high distinction, and the

other a copy of a photograph taken from the "rogue's gallery;" the greater prominence perhaps given to the latter. Events of universal import, fortunate or unhappy, call for the truth, the facts; but it is not necessary nor proper to magnify and invent horrors to be flashed forth under lurid headlines. Such is bait to ensnare people, not food to free them. Yet too often these are the papers that sway the masses, that rule them! Therefore when disgraceful and calumnious happenings of stage environments receive and command the greater space and attention, what real incentive is there to arouse the true critic to the stern arduousness and high dignity of his office? None but cultured men and women of literary taste and distinction, learned in, devoted to, and possessed of special discernment in the art of criticism, should be called to such an onerous trust. Such a state of affairs is of imperative need now.

We cannot properly progress without an honest condition of criticism. It is a power which, when justly put and sanely applied (and we recognize no other sort) constitutes — a safety-valve to check our faults and speed our merits. Fool is he who tampers with its proper functions! The critic, if he be one of truly deserving credential, establishes a standard by which to judge. If you reach such approximately, or even approach that approximation, to praise you is with him a strange delight. But if you fall beneath, or entirely of that standard, it is the critic's duty to himself, to you, and most particularly to the public to say so. Do not believe that in the mind of the genuine critic there lurks behind his power to



sting, the slightest thought that he might maim. Too often the greater pain is his.

The first performance of a play or player of any importance whatsoever, or the initial appearance of actor or actress bidding for serious consideration in a part of severe proportions (or of any special importance in stage affairs) should be attended and reviewed by the dramatic critic of every reputable newspaper and periodical in the locality in which such initiatory essayal takes place. If these critics be honest and generally proficient in the art they profess, while they may often differ materially in their discernment of the minor details of the play and players, nevertheless they must sufficiently agree in the vital elements that maintain their highest character, to be able to present to the public a judgment upon which it may safely determine the desirability or no of an indulgence of the exhibit in question. The author or actor claiming clemency for this initial performance readily admits a state of hurriedness and unpreparedness which truly exists most generally in the theatre in America today. A condition seriously retarding any worthy inclination for art advancement. For the critic to humor such bid for leniency would only be to increase this lamentable state of shiftless indifference to art tendencies, and to inflict upon the public all the more the much too prevalent custom of "working a play into shape" by imposing upon this public's indulgence through the imperfection of these first performances. A discriminate distribution of complimentary tickets and the ever apparent "first-nighters," (the unchronicled wisdom of the play house), furnishes a desirable balance to the fashioning of a just

estimate of any initial performance that has undergone honest preparation. Then let the public hear its censor.

The actor is loath to admit adverse criticism; he is quick to accept, and think true, any word of flattery. This is an universal trait in man, it is true, but in the actor the condition is alarming. He spends hours in abusing the individual who instigates his displeasure, but seldom, if ever, gives a moment's thought to any possible accrement that may add to his condition by an unfeverish, reflective consideration of the criticism offered. Criticism honestly given, even though it be not always entirely sagacious, must bear some sort of advantage to the recipient if he has the wisdom to accept and sift it. There are critics today in America whose writings should be a constant source of study and profit to the actor. That they seldom are, but to the contrary remain unread and unsought, or are cast aside with abrupt comments, (compromising only to the provoker), or, perhaps, in an assumed attitude of defense, used as a mean advertising medium, is a condition truly prevalent in America today.

It is true that a deplorable abuse of the offices of criticism exists in many of the departments devoted to the drama in the great daily papers of America today. It is genuine cause for just censure in the quarter from which it issues, and justifiable reason for ready sympathy for the actor. This form of criticism descends to the vicious practices that do most readily appeal to the ever present clamor for flavorful, sensational reading, a condition today, which, in the alarming competition for supremacy in circulation, is firmly discolored many formerly cleaner sheets

into a fast and perilous yellow dye. Just reproach is here supplanted by ill-mannered ridicule, sometimes when not even the former would be justifiable. This condition of criticism often makes targets of some of the few really worthy personages, (who, by untiring energy and serious devotion to the art they honor, have placed themselves at the top of their profession), targets at which the servile agents of this sorry condition may shoot the venomous shafts of their unreasoned opinions and prejudices. Yet, in spite of this fact, the vast multitude of actors in America to-day eagerly seek, devour and apparently relish, in its general survey, this type of journalism, and seldom turn to the pages of a newspaper with a general policy more rational and less dangerous at least, (in that it appeals more to the reasoning, and less to the sensual forces), and whose contents is not predominantly a matter of alluring headlines, exaggerated detail and profane caricatures, and where the subject of dramatic criticism receives at least serious and earnest attention, and in some instances is yet unfettered by commercial shackles and arrogant autocracy.

It is truly necessary for the protection and edification of the public, and for the cause of true art in the drama, that this retrograde condition be checked, and that the high charge of criticism be re-instated and left free to a just exercise of its proper functions, and that its incumbent be understood and proclaimed — the rightful censor. And as such the press should exalt and defend him, the public hear and heed, the manager beckon and respect, and the actor seek and study him. Provide these conditions and the critic seeks you. He creates himself, and qualifies his

charge. The abuse of criticism often snuffs the flame it lit. Begin then to weed this garden of what is "rank" and "gross;" sow anew, possess it with beauty, and place it above censorship. The critic would be the first to applaud!

Number seven of "Stage Affairs" appearing February 26, 1907, concerns:—

THE VAUDEVILLE SYSTEM.

THE MORALLY ILLEGAL ABUSE OF ITS TRUE MEANT
SIGNIFICANCE.

1907
A series of fifteen pamphlets issued weekly on Tuesdays
from January 15 to April 23, inclusive

NUMBER SEVEN

FEBRUARY 26, 1907

STAGE AFFAIRS IN AMERICA TODAY

BY

ALLEN DAVENPORT



BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

P. O. BOX 1341

SINGLE NUMBERS TEN CENTS

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Stage Affairs in America Today.

—BY—

ALLEN DAVENPORT.

VII.

THE VAUDEVILLE SYSTEM.

THE MORALLY ILLEGAL ABUSE OF ITS TRUE MEANT
SIGNIFICANCE.

The vaudeville stage in America today presents much that is genuine, really worthy, and which often is of unquestionable superior merit. Were it operated normally, freed of the spongy absorption of despotic monopoly (and its consequent avaricious practice of continue activity), and so satisfied to remain responsible for a sane adherence to its true purposes, it could adequately, and with distinction, maintain (undoubtedly to a condition of high remunerative satisfaction) the not too overcrowded ranks of legitimate vaudeville artists. But in its continue indifference to such a desirable stipulation, it too frequently entertains matter quite irrelevant to the true understanding of the title it impertinently assumes. The vaudeville stage of today, and for a number of years past, has, both invitingly and beseechingly, become the refuge of actors and actresses (of more or less prominence) whose popularity in their proper sphere

of activity has begun to wane, causing consequently in the keen discernment of their conjoined business managers a like proportionate condition of diminished commercial importance. These actors and actresses then condescend (or otherwise) to enter the field of vaudeville. Sometimes they possess qualities of real merit; but oftener they are trading on a popularity and prominence ill-deserved, as regards any positive enjoyment of genuine histrionic ability. The vaudeville manager, in his speculative sense of box-office gains,—and perhaps, moreover, through the knowledge of an urgent necessity of filling in the extraordinary hours of the prevalent (and abominable) system of continuous performance,—seizes upon such opportunity, and (if a “proper vehicle” can be found, and tested as to its possible fitness, or unfitness, that is, if there appears to be a gambling chance) boldly proclaims such generous condescension, magnifying the character of the type that heralds it (to the diminished importance of many genuine and truly meritorious acts of distinctive vaudeville mark), granting in return for such humiliation the compensation of exorbitant remuneration, of course wholly contingent on the mere speculative nature of the trade.

This is not just to the men and women who have conscientiously trained for the vaudeville stage; who have given hours, days, and years of practice that they may perfect terpsichorean, vocal, legerdemain, instrumental, acrobatic, mimical, ventriloquous and many other forms of skill pertaining to genuine vaudeville, not forgetting the patient efforts of those who train and prepare the dumb animal for feats of almost incredible dimensions. And so, to the unjust

pecuniary embarrassment of such, we are given fragmentary scenes from classic drama, curtailed editions of truly meritorious comedies and farces, unskilfully reduced to suit the requirements of "time limit," mangled both in preparation and exhibition. Then we have to endure the original "sketch" (written around some emphatic mannerism or peculiarity of the actor or actress), often senseless in plot, weak in structure, feeble, coarse and boisterous in context and delivery. Many of the actors and actresses thus supplanting the vaudeville artists have never known, or, if they have, seldom respected or heeded the value of necessary preparation for their own condition of the theatre, wherein, had they properly appreciated such necessity, they might indeed rightfully solicit audience in the practice of their profession.

The vaudeville stage today, in its abnormal system of conduction, and demanding as it does a continued season of uninterruptedness, and a day of unnatural proportions, holds out a tempting allurements to the actor and actress drifting through this age of commercialism. Greater and lesser lights, major and minor quantities, who, in common belief, agree that the chief value a stage career can hold for them is — the all-important condition of immediate pecuniary gain; and that stipulation always at the stubborn neglect of any studious inclination to treat seriously and devotedly the institution of the theatre, and the true cause of dramatic art.

The vaudeville stage in America today is passing through that condition of business policy that marks the expansive plan of the great department store of our large cities. I have said elsewhere that I believe in trusts, corporations and large com-

binations when honestly operated. I believe in the facilitation and concentration of business in expansive countries, and in large and crowded cities. But the medium of facilitation and concentration must be honest in its solicitation of patronage, and never stretch out to the proportions of vicious monopoly, which, when at last secure in its condition of despotic importance, shall mercilessly force upon its purchasers the necessitous acceptance of its wares through a determined energy to stifle in other quarters the condition and spirit of healthy competition,—the vitality of all enterprise; the surest incentive to high workmanship, superior production, and their consequent just remuneration.

We see today in the vaudeville the department store of the theatre. Goods of all descriptions in theatrical trade are in its lists, with the customary reduction in price; but the sign that contains this conglomerate admixture remains still—the vaudeville, a title wrongfully claimed by reason of the morally illegal abuse of its true meant significance. What direct bearing does this existing condition have upon any immediate and future hope for high business integrity and art aim in the theatre in America? To properly answer that question, (and in justice to the powers that seek to almost completely control the vaudeville system of today), it is necessary to consider first a condition of so-called high class management which has drawn from the vaudeville ranks much of its potency, and by maintaining a certain character of person (more or less cunning in a prevalent vulgar method of skeleton play construction) is enabled to furnish these renegade vaudeville artists with slender frames in which to encase their special aptness, sur-

round them with incongruous matter more or less rudely entertaining, and, through despotic offices of self-controlment, parade them in the theatres, wherein must compete for equal solicitation the truly worthy combination of high dramatic importance.

At least twenty years ago (and for many seasons following) there came into sudden notice and increasing prominence, a writer of what were then termed farce comedies. As an instigator of impudent satire, ready inventiveness and laugh-provoking incidents and situations, this author (in the fertility and fruitfulness of his numerous, varied and successful productions) might be truly proclaimed a genius. Into all of these farces were interpolated acts of genuine vaudeville quality. These farces occupied the stages of the first class theatres throughout the United States of America. In the early flush of their successes, (and for years after), generous, and often excessive, salaries were paid to the engaging people. Many men and women long associated with these plays found difficulty in adapting themselves to other environments when their own popularity (and that of the plays also) began to wane. That fact remains so in many cases even to the present day. Many young women, promising much for future usefulness in higher walks of dramatic and operatic endeavor, were caught and held by the glamor of quick pecuniary gain, persuasion of the managing powers, and by the voluntary attentions received from a certain stamp of theatre followers, and the consequent showy prominence attained through being associated with this special type of "show" girl.

The author of these farces, at first quite alone in his class, soon had many imitators. For years the stage

was infested and overrun with this vicious form of entertainment, which claimed, and was accorded, a place in our best theatres. It spread into the various wilder forms of musical comedy, burletta, extravaganza, etc., invading and usurping the worthy fields of genuine burlesque and comic opera. It exists today in an alarming condition. These pieces contain little consistency, continuity or proper proportions. They are mere skeletons of inanity, stuffed with doughy substance, clothed and decked with vain, variegated feathers, with here and there a dash of vim by the interpolated special skill of some former colleague of the vaudeville. The rest, many of whom can neither sing, dance, nor act with even any small degree of proficiency, become the mere accessories which go to make up a "show," and which must fill out the time necessary to exhibit such in the theatres entertaining first-class combinations. Still here we see much which is more distinctly vaudeville than some of the "bills" provided by the present day vaudeville houses.

Thus today in first class combinations, we see, under the names of "show," scant vaudeville with prodigious setting; and often at the vaudeville we find (under some misnomer, unwarrantable presumption, inapplicable title) adventurous dramatic inferiority protruding from under a cloak of great pretence. Even in the cases of some truly worthy dramatic artists, we are forced to admit that both their endeavors and the material used seem incongruous to the environments. In the great swirl of commercialism that has overtaken the general trend of theatrical affairs today, this ever apparent disregard for the true offices of the particular form of entertainment specially advertised

is signally appalling. In its present significance, directly bearing on the theatre today, this one concentrate force — commercialism — dominates the scene, ruthlessly tripping up, in its mad rush to attain its ends, the higher aims of business integrity, justness and art employment. What it foretells for the future, if not checked and corrected, is only a simple matter of time and speculative certainty.

In the case of the growing, bulging and leechlike propensities of this great department store of the theatre, so often indifferent to the means and quality of the purchase and exhibition of its wares in many of its departments, this spirit of irregular commercialism is sapping the very life blood and vitality of its morally legal possession, where its proper aims should rather ever seek to safeguard and promote to its true meant significance its very own—the vaudeville.

Number eight of "Stage Affairs," appearing March 5, 1907, concerns:—

THE PREVAILING STOCK SYSTEM.

ITS PRACTICES A DETRIMENT TO ART AIM.

APR 11 1907

A series of fifteen pamphlets issued weekly on Tuesdays
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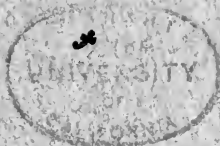
NUMBER EIGHT

MARCH 5, 1907

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ALLEN DAVENPORT



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—BY—

ALLEN DAVENPORT.

VIII.

THE PREVAILING STOCK SYSTEM.

ITS PRACTICES A DETRIMENT TO ART AIM.

The stock company wherein the leading actors are proficient and experienced in the art they profess, intellectual, well-mannered, studious, and approximately prepared and able to personate with artistic discernment the vital roles of the drama,—a condition that ever must remain the actor's sure foundation, the test of his fitness to rightfully claim the privilege to practise his art,—and wherein its entering and less experienced members, intrusted with comparatively smaller parts, are enabled eventually (by a serious self-devotion to their art, steady progression through fitting preparation and constant study, and also by emulation of their higher associates) to attain a just proficiency in that art,—such a stock company, operating normally on sound methods, capable of presenting in an adequate manner for public approval and critical comment the higher and standard works of dramatic literature, and qualified (by an unre-

stricted condition of preparation) to promote, and to methodically, artistically and effectually produce modern, new and untried plays, is, and ever will remain, the bulwark and enduring strength of the institution of the theatre in any land.

But the prevailing stock system in America today presents no such condition. There may be one or two English-speaking companies wherein is apparent, perhaps, a spirit and an inclination towards such a proper state of affairs, but the general existing condition, relating to the great majority of stock companies to-day, is a routine of ill-ordered, unfinished mechanism, quite removed from the finer principles of art aim, and any just appreciation of the necessary co-essential balancing forces, — business substantiality and artistic worth; and consequently produces a state detrimental to the proper formation, growth, and mould of the actor, — criminally exhausting his nervous system, and often injurious to his physique (offering no genuine reparation for such abuse), and furthermore must, by the imperative need of a constant changing and insistent regularity in the material put forth (regardless of fitting preparedness and proper finish), establish and maintain methods in defiance to the true principles of business integrity.

The fact that the public patronizes, is loyal to, and apparently relishes this condition of underdone dramatic victuals does not condone for this deterioration of substantial business stamina, or for the injury done to actor and the art of acting, which this abuse of what should be the best conditioned state of the theatre widely and irreverently produces. The ardor manifested, adulation bestowed, and their resultant effects brought to bear by the patrons of this phase

of the theatre (honest though they may be), are most harmful, in so much as they kindle and wrongfully incite in the actor a sense of self-esteem and proper efficiency which the hurried and insufficient preparatory condition (compulsory to the system) totally unwarrants, thus spreading a conflagratory stimulant that must sooner or later consume the essential it serves. Friendly applause, unmindful of bestowment whether merited or no, must lose its stimulation to the true artist when drunk from such a source. But it is seldom lost in the personnel of the prevailing stock company of today. Few there are, even of unmistakable talent, and an inherent sense of appropriate and ready application of the same, whose ultimate worth does not become seriously endangered by the viciousness of the prevailing stock system of today.

This stock actor is called for rehearsal generally at ten o'clock, sometimes half-past nine, each morning (save one, perhaps, in every week). He is obliged to appear at two performances each day, twelve in a week (and often fourteen, for many stock companies require that today). Scarcely has he committed to memory (too often incompletely so) the bare words of his part, hopelessly robbed of the smallest possibility of an adequate grasp of its complete meaning (or the slightest opportunity offered for an artistic portrayal), when he has "thrown at him," as he would say, another part, the former becoming then a thoughtless anxiety, its presentation being left, in a large measure, to the prompt routine expertness of its portrayer, and the equally ready response of his associates. Deprived of all satisfying sense that rewards the artist who has labored sufficiently to beautifully paint and finish his portrait, what worthy

motive can hold a man or woman to the practice of such a debasement of the exalted art he claims to profess?

The one predominant cause is here: The actor seeks ever the medium nearest at hand that will most quickly and readily meet his standard of reasoning, which is — that the actor's vocation is chiefly a business; keeping paramount at all times (and predominant to any just consideration of art, or the expectancy of a condition of fixedness and useful future, through progressive preparation) the one ruling common understanding, that he is in the business alone for the money there is in it. This is not said in disparagement of proper thrift, but rather in well considered protest against this almost universal argument prevailing amongst actors and actresses in America today. We should all claim ultimately a just remuneration. If you prepare for your art properly and thoroughly, and practise it honestly and faithfully, the fitting recompense will come. And yet, if the actor and actress could with honesty say, "We do not seriously solicit heed for any art intention," there might be shown some leniency. But no, they wish to be acknowledged as artists. They crave that distinction in the public eye; yet among themselves, in common understanding, it is a business first and last, and any condition of the theatre that shall most immediately serve to substantiate that understanding, gains their readiest acceptance. There is no phase of the theatre in so direct opposition to the proper conditions that ensure a healthy growth and progress in art, as is this same prevailing stock system under consideration. And with those who gravitate to its activity, it is plainly (except regarding the immediate consid-

eration of the mere business prospect) an unreasoned course.

Stock actors today continually boast that, in a majority of cases, their individual performances (particularly in the reproduction of current modern plays) equal, and generally surpass, the presentation given by the members of the so-called original cast. In rare instances this is sometimes true. But such cases are indeed few. More often such assumptions are unreasonable and absurd; the outgrowth of unmerited self-esteem, unreasoned opinion, and a mistaken belief in the importance of their untutored condition. This is forcibly true in the event of the presentation of a classic play. There is often seen, not only an unwise curtailment of the eloquent, poetical beauties of the play, a palpable inability on the part of the actors to adequately render, with intelligence, elegance and effectualness, the sublime grandeur of its context, a total inefficiency to the attainment of any approximate degree of dignified loftiness in the exposition of the "great moments" in the drama (these deficiencies are, of course, generally evident also in the one-play combination), but there exists, furthermore, a stubborn neglect of any serious attempt to faithfully commit and speak the exact lines of the text. The stock actor of today fakes the classics with the same religious carelessness that he does the trivialities of the modern procreator of dramatic prodigality. And yet this same actor (boasting often an undeniable pride in the fact of his total ignorance and indifference to the classic drama) many times gains approbation and applause, and a consequent sense of self-satisfaction in an estimate of his own capabilities regarding his

fit qualifications and proficiency in the classic drama. The themes and harmonious beauties of great plays, like grand operas, cannot be obliterated nor hopelessly defaced, even though entrusted to the efforts of insufficient (if earnest) mediocrity and brazen charlatantry. Like the loftiness of the eagle's flight, they soar sublimely above and beyond the mere horizon, whereon, in restless disorder, perch the less ambitious species of their kind.

There is no phase of the theatre today wherein the offices of genuine criticism are left to such neglect and relegated to like abuse as in this condition of prevailing stock system. This lack of any sufficient medium of criticism is much to blame for its woful state of continuous unpreparedness. A great many of the plays used by these stock companies are of comparatively recent construction, and have served a little term in the feverish market of theatrical speculation, and when drained of all essence of any further special commercial value to the speculating medium, are rented to the stock companies. To such organizations, operating on abnormal, incomplete methods, these modern plays offer the most desirable medium to suit the demands of a hurried preparation. All the details of the original production are fully and clearly designated; the positions and "business" of the characters plainly exposed. A sufficient retention of the lines, adroitness in delivering them, and also in supplying the positions and "business," constitute the actual responsibility of the actor in presenting such plays. The additional necessary preparations entailed in matters of "make-up" and dressing (accompanying the indispensable function of committing to mem-

ory the lines of the part) rob the actor of any further possibility of applying to his performance a care and finish that shall promote to any desired degree an adequate exposition of the actor's art. Imperfections and defects, unavoidable in the initiate performance, must, through the lack of opportunity to eradicate or adjust them, magnify as the performances progress. In any re-representation of the play, the actor is generally more concerned in the enjoyment of the respite afforded by such repetition than in the opportunity afforded him to improve his portrayal of the part. And finally, the character of these plays and parts is not of any permanent importance to the stage, nor indicative of any stable medium through which the actor may advance his art and condition. The critic is not in evidence. His opinion has been passed upon the production made originally under conditions entailing more sufficient care in preparation, and often reviewed only after repeated performances.

Criticism here (concerning the stock company) descends, more generally, to the smart practices of the press agent, or to the uncritical efforts of general journalism, often proffered through direct instruction from the authorities of the theatre. Under such conditions favorites are installed, advanced and maintained. Actors and actresses are led into convictions of their own ability and importance that a just critical estimate could furnish no warrant for. These inconsequential though flattering notices too often falsely impress and influence the patrons of this condition of the theatre towards an absurd idolatry of the players; a condition which in turn only emphasizes the already questionable quality of these players'

intrinsic worth histrionically. Many actors and actresses insert in the columns of advertising mediums these same notices, that agents, by whom they were prepared, make free confession were instituted and exhibited for business purposes only, indifferent to any inferior talent of the actor or actress in question.

And yet the critic (he who seldom visits or passes judgment on the happenings of this condition of the theatre) frequently champions, and justly so, the cause of the truly meritorious stock system, the one outlined at the beginning of this chapter. That an occasional observance of the stock system prevalent in America today might, and in one particular instance evidently did, compel an adverse opinion, is well exemplified in the following illustration, and emphasizes the imperative need of critical review in that quarter. A foremost critic in a large theatrical centre, — one who had given considerable space in praise of the really valuable stock company, touching on its special importance towards the proper developing of actors, — thus openly, in contrary terms, expressed an opinion as follows concerning the deplorable conditions apparent in one of the most largely patronized of these prevailing stock companies. To my careful observance this esteemed critic had not, previous to this occasion, given any regular comment on the efforts of the stock company in question. However, on this occasion, under his signature appeared the following: "The company evidently sacrificed themselves to please their patrons." And further on added, concerning these same patrons, that they had much to learn in the matter of punctuality, and in "breaking themselves of the habit of almost incessant talking,"

and in the "acquiring of an instinct which shall teach them when to laugh and when not." Surely a stock system evolving such an abuse of the art it would boast to promote and maintain, and demanding at once from its individual incumbents a subserviency to the required standard of its patrons, and an indulgence of their innocent or purposed rudeness in order to retain their patronage, forms a practical demonstration and unretractible confession of its undeniable detriment to art aim. Add to this extreme condition of voluntary surrender of any slight power possessed to somewhat maintain a standard of art endeavor, and the extreme impossibility, through the abnormal conduction of the system, to ever attain a just criterion of sound importance, and who can deny, through such practices, its force of constant detriment to art aim; and, in the determined, energetic maintenance of this unprepared, unfinished state, an enforced lack of business integrity?

And let it be said (and truly to his credit) that this same critic recently brought the force of his worthy office into special usefulness by a recent reviewal of this same stock company, and of yet another one toiling in the same centre of activity. Concerning the latter he gave a most impartial criticism of that company's "courageous" intentions to portray the characterizations of a master playwright. In praising the ambitious departure from a usual routine, and further pleading a support for such from serious playgoers (a generous action but somewhat questionable), nevertheless, he was forced to say that it was "impossible to admit that the result wholly justified the innovation. If the play is to be a success in its acted

form, it can only become such by being interpreted by a company of *skilful actors, full of resources, and competent in the lighter shades of character interpretation.*" Such "genuine criticism," justly censuring the fallacies of the prevailing stock system of today in unpreparedly and unconcernedly attempting the exposition of the higher drama, is imperatively needed very generally.

And how can this phase of the theatre, in continued adherence to such abnormal practices, ever evolve and secure a criterion upon which to measure a fixed standard of high attainment in the institution of the theatre, and the art of the actor? The material generally promoted by these stock companies has little positive value to ensure any permanence; the conditions surrounding its exposition are of such unpreparedness, high tension, and incompleteness as must forbid a proper exhibit of either the matter or the medium through which it is revealed. It is merely a waste of material and energy to no stable purpose, and at the risk of physical and nerve forces. It is building with insecure substance through incomplete means. No beneficial structure can result and remain. And even when sterling material (substantial form, sound model) is furnished, there is no sufficient preparedness to skilfully mould the substance, no adequate means to finish, to complete the work, nor would there be time to properly apply any skill or means should it really exist in approximate efficiency. Consequently must be seen (in the imperative pertinacity of both manager and actor to exhibit the model) not alone an injury to the model itself, but also a detriment to the medium employed in the exposition, caus-

ing a constant defectiveness; a condition which, if left uncorrected, must of its own reactive force impede any possible advance in the true condition of art aim in the actor's efforts.

Number nine of "Stage Affairs," appearing March 12, 1907, concerns:

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ITS MANIFEST CONDITION GENERALLY IRRELEVANT TO
THE CONSEQUENCE OF ITS TRUE MEANING.

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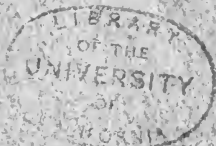
NUMBER NINE

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- No. 8. The Prevailing Stock System. Its Practises a Detriment to Art Aim.

Stage Affairs in America Today.

—BY—

ALLEN DAVENPORT.

IX.

THE STAR SYSTEM.

ITS MANIFEST CONDITION GENERALLY IRRELEVANT TO
THE CONSEQUENCE OF ITS TRUE MEANING.

With the theatre in America today, as with many other phases of commercial life, there too often exists a policy to thrust to the front inexperience, incompetency and impudence, to the exclusion of tested knowledge and real merit (and their attendant modesties), the former conditions being backed and maintained generally by the power of monopolistic control engendering the germs which breed cheapened labor, inferior ability, and a consequent condition of demoralization. On the stage today, the existence of this condition cannot with truthfulness be denied.

The name "star" (applicable to individuals in various occupations, but perhaps more generally and popularly suited to those of the stage) should be conferred only as a badge of honor for an unmistakable, truly merited distinction of superior ability, which may manifest itself through individual high mental endeavor, or through a sagacious faculty (either by

marked intelligence or by natural gift) of quick discernment to receive, comprehend and readily expose the substantial teachings of another, and thereby being empowered to predominantly attract, shine and convince in the exhibition of talent in a general setting of some supplied medium. There should always be apparent a genuine manifestation of a proven fitness to the claim of star distinction. It should never come through any anticipate sense, or forced condition, brought about by the mere power of opulence, and the opportunities its tyrannical persuasion may buy, regardless of the absence of real merit and propriety; nor through the sheer speculation alone of hereditary transmission, nor (and most to be censured) through the bare channels of sensationalism, base notoriety and social scandal.

The American stage today contains a few personages rightfully claiming the titular, star. But in the cases of far too many who intrusively enter upon its threshold (or are thrust thereon), we find no manifestation of any moral right to the condition of star distinction. Therefore we often find, as a consequence, many stars of a few years and longer ago, returned to the quality of an ordinary player, and occupying positions sometimes of no special importance. Their condition of commercial weight having been tested and found wanting, or else sifted of any further profit, and they themselves not possessing the essential elements to maintain, through any self-merited achievements, the true condition of stellar importance, have been quickly relegated to their previous standing, and their places as stars open again to the speculative mood of the manager, who seizes upon any opportune chance to humor that mood, and quite generally indifferent

to any question of the essential fitness of the fortunate (or unfortunate) one precipitated into the privileged position of star prominence. This is a state of affairs existing to a marked degree in the acknowledged first-class managements of today.

It is not unusual, and it is perfectly right, that the matter of years and experience should play no special part in the peculiar fitness of a person to become a star. Acting is more a question of preparation, study and finish in the pursuit of an art aim. Experience is, of course, when practised constantly in the right direction, invaluable to the consummation of that art. But wanting in a proper preparation, and lacking an inclination to study, and foregoing a struggle for the attainment of that finish, experience is often a disinterested teacher, and in the stubbornness of its pupil to couple any condition of self-helpful energy to the advantages of its teachings, frequently leaves him to the mercy of such neglect, an inattention which, by the steady augmentation of his heedlessness, can but add to his faults as time goes on.

A person early installed as a star should not expect to progress to a proper degree of stability and permanence without the discipline of constant study, unceasing practice, and concentrated energy, any more than might an ordinary player without such qualifications expect to eventually attain that distinction. Yet how seldom does the vaporous star of today consider the necessity of such discipline. A suitable vehicle must be found in which to parade some special accomplishment, and best obscure the limitations of this star. Few there are in whom rest the essential qualities to adequately display the serious designs of the higher drama, and fewer still who can at all effect the exacting conditions of the classics.

The virtuoso who must select composition suited only to the limited consequence of his accomplishments is not truly a virtuoso. If he cannot always excel in a varied range of classical composition, he must nevertheless attain an art finish sufficient to technically and intelligently display the dignified intention of the composer, or otherwise he cannot hold the coveted distinction, nor will he be allowed to exercise the superior tests of virtuosity; neither shall he command audience and respect.

The star, the virtuoso performer of the stage, recognizes no necessity of such a condition of art finish, nor does the manager who parades him, nor the audience that patronizes him. The star today stands (for the most part) a favored individual through some condition totally irrelevant to the consequence of the true meaning of his appellative significance. To deny to the instrumentalist, the medium interpreting the predominant theme of the composer, the possession of the title virtuoso through his inability to attain a proper art standard, and to indiscriminately accord the charlatan instrumentalist, the actor (interpreting the predominant theme of the playwright), the title star only exalts the more the genuineness of the former, and the louder pronounces the vainglorious emptiness of the latter. This condition extending generally throughout the entire vocation of acting, and so placing upon its encumbents no compulsory stipulation of preparation, progress and ultimate proficiency to warrant their fitness to practise such an art, but leaving all access to its abode unguarded and free to every means and ends of irregularity, constantly obstructs the most desired growth, and must, through a continued existence, and no attempt to



adjust or remove such obstruction, remain a steady menace to the highest state of productiveness of the drama in America.

It is not strange, therefore, in this almost total disregard for the establishment of a tested and visible fitness that may rightfully permit the aspirant to engage in a career of histrionic service, that so many of the so-called stars of today, when failing in the expectancy and exhibition of the medium provided them, and not possessing the essential qualities to sustain the higher exactions of genuine stellar significance, must either retire to the ranks of the ordinary player, or revert to some former "success," in hopes of sponging up its well-worn fabrics into temporary use, until they shall again be fitted to a new form best emphasizing some special peculiarity, and so obscuring the many defects arising from such fundamental deformity. But while there exists a tendency on the part of the manager to generally ignore the practices of higher integrity, and an inclination on the part of the actor to deny and neglect the essential forces of fundamental import necessary to the preparation, progress and finish of any art, just so long will the American stage continue to be no more than a commercial mart where humanity and inanimate substance challenges alike the speculative fancy of the manager, and who so holds them of equal importance in the preparation of his "prop" list.

There is a class of star (and theatrical company) invading a territory generally unfrequented by the more pretentious companies (although often visited by a most praiseworthy class of star of whom we shall speak later), which, in its unwarranted confidence or wilful viciousness, often brazenly heralds a promise

of extraordinary display that neither the material presented nor the talent employed can in any way fulfil. They often work their way on the vulgar plan of mere trickery; that is, any means of getting into a town; calloused to any thought or care of the treachery practised upon the public, content only in the knowledge that they are leaving the same day. Some districts of the United States are cursed with this transitory condition of theatrical garbage, scattering in its trail the sordid seeds of mistrust, misbelief and misunderstanding, that too often choke the more wholesome products of its kind; and which, furthermore, freely placards the highest acceptance of the best condition of plays and players with the same insignia as its own, in one common vernacular,—“troupe” and “trouper.” In the adjustment of this condition is needed a strict adherence to the principles of business integrity among the managers of the theatres and halls in the towns through which such companies squirm. Although sometimes deceived, nevertheless these managers often solicit and find profit in such material. They sacrifice much integrity to gain a little reimbursement of the cash drawer. Perhaps there is a compensative propriety in their conduct.

Even in many of these small cities and towns, the manager is bound securely by the dictates of a selfish power. He cannot have whom he will, and dare not refuse whom he would. To fill the exigencies of the booking department of this great power, these various managers are often required to crowd within the space of one week as many attractions as there are days in that week. Perhaps not one of these attractions is of sufficient worth or standing to place any

desired gain into the hands of the local manager, particularly in view of this despotic enforcement of entertainment in a town incapable of decently supporting more than one or two attractions in a week; and, moreover, through the fee demanded for the booking of such undesirable encumbrances. Perhaps the following week or two are left to absolute neglect by the machinery of this vast booking agency. A desire to fill in this vacuum often leads these managers to the speculative medium of their trade.

They complain of the material forced upon them, and of the indifference shown to their importance as managers in not being favored with the best quality under the dictatorial distribution of this large controlment. In the abnormality of such conditions it is not strange that they should resort to an indiscriminate practice in the rental and percentage plans of the theatre. In this speculation they often find more profit, and occasionally present material and talent superior to that forced upon them by dictatorial supremacy of the power that forces their signal releasement of independence. For much that they must accept through that means is of a most inferior pattern, finding excuse for its existence through the various channels of opulence, cringing partisanship, peculiar favoritism, and often, on the part of the first party, through a malicious desire to offset, and sometimes even ruin, the prospects of some displeasing competitor. In this condition of managerial practice, the class of star just alluded to finds a greedy boon for the exercise of his (or her) obnoxious vanity and bloated incompetency.

There is another quite opposite (but most commendable) phase of the star system; in its activity

also removed somewhat from the more coveted sphere of first-class distinction, but still, in its self-evidentness, often of far more genuine importance (regarding also the substance of the plays presented) than the manifest condition of the "high priced" star of today, so generally irrelevant to his true meant significance. It is indeed delightful to note and praise the independence of some few actors and actresses (genuine stars), who endure many inconveniences in travel and disadvantages in theatres that they may still maintain an individual dignity and distinction which their properly matured art and experience honestly admits of.

Before the ingress of theatrical monopoly, and at its inception, many of these stage lights were then firmly established and deserving stars; playing in theatres of highest class, and enjoying throughout the country in cities of largest importance the patronage and wise discernment of both public and press. But there they were stayed in their ripening maturity, and thus neglected by the stipulation of irregular commercialism (a state of disorder which, by reason of a forced hurriedness ever necessary to meet the extravagant demands of its abnormal growth, must of consequence supplant the condition of quality by the substitution of quantity), these qualified artists were obliged to step aside and gradually deviate to the less desirable avenues that did not then hold the pecuniary profit and value sufficient to specially warrant a speculative condition of immediate combination with the main thoroughfares, already fast being seized and held by the ambitious, hastening strides of commercialism; thoroughfares which, if these players would hope to re-step, they must once and for all sacrifice to the

theatrical "highway commission" every true sense of merited independence and unrestrained artistic enjoyment.

And so today we find really worthy stars (who have been ousted from their proper sphere, or deprived therein of their rightful province, through an unjust classification of the apportionment of theatres under the control of this "highway commission") affording, to personal disadvantages, great benefit in small centres, through the presentation of truly commendable plays and the exhibition of superior art. Perhaps there is some compensation in that fact; and which may to some degree offset that long prevalent and stubborn process of histrionic incendiarism, producing only ashed insurance settlements, miserly scattered to kindle another transitory "meteor," soon to become in turn a wanton waste of theatrical combustion, whose darkened ashes shall illumine all the more the genuineness of the truly lustrous star.

Number ten of "Stage Affairs," appearing March 19, 1907, concerns:

THE REPERTOIRE SYSTEM.

MANY COMPENSATIONS FOR ITS MARKED DECADENCE.



A series of fifteen pamphlets issued weekly on Tuesdays
from January 15 to April 23, inclusive

NUMBER TEN

MARCH 19, 1907

STAGE AFFAIRS IN AMERICA TODAY

BY

ALLEN DAVENPORT

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

P. O. BOX 1341

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Stage Affairs in America Today.

—BY—

ALLEN DAVENPORT.

X.

THE REPERTOIRE SYSTEM.

MANY COMPENSATIONS FOR ITS MARKED DECADENCE.

There are a few "high-class repertoire" companies in America today existing in the best condition that that term implies. Too much commendation, encouragement and support can not be given this class of attraction which carefully and adequately prepares and exhibits an interesting and varied line of worthy plays. But the stars and managements who attempt this today are few indeed. Two reasons principally may be advanced for this apparent decadence in the high-class repertoire system.

First, the enormous expense required to properly produce each individual play to meet the ready expectancy of the "public," who (to use the argument employed generally by the present-day managers) looks first of all for a "show"; albeit, to that public's unsophistication, this "show" is often an intensioned chromo-type deceit. Notwithstanding, to equip and

transport a first-class company playing in an extended repertoire is today a matter of great expense. To all managers so doing and meeting the modern expectation of a good production, much credit and deserving support is due.

The other reason for a seeming decadency in first-class repertoire is this: there are few actors and actresses in America today, as compared to a period fifteen or more years ago, who can, with sufficient art and practice, evenly sustain throughout a repertoire of varied and exacting parts an interest and attention that shall equally offset the scenic, electrical, and otherwise lavish embellishments of the prevalent one-play combination system of to-day. However, lamentable as the last mentioned condition may appear to many, and further conceding that oftentimes the spectacular element of the play today is in tinsel excess of the actual rational demands, nevertheless I believe this condition of elaborate preparation for display and lavishness in production to be of vast and permanent importance, stimulating an emulative condition of present worth and future value to the American stage, and consequently serves, to a very considerable extent, a substantial compensation for the regrettable departure of the earlier repertoire system, with its many lustrous and versatile stars, backgrounded by dingy stock scenery, and surrounded by incongruously and illy-robed supernumeraries and impossible accessories.

In a broad outline of art aim in the theatre all auxiliary assistance and ornamentation should receive sufficient attention in the general preparation and production of a play; but at very most they should never

become more than adjunctives. The condition of a play stands first; and then the consideration of its portrayal. The vanities that adorn these essentials should be appropriately fitted to such forms only when those forms are fittingly appropriate to wear them. Art expression is the approximate perfection finally manifested in some originally conceived superior type or beautiful idea. If such conception and manifestation of the playwright (and exposition of the player) are not superior and beautiful in themselves, no adjunctive embellishment can truly make them so, any more than can a gilded frame make amends for an inferior canvas. A beautiful canvas may be less attractive to the uncultivated eye, perhaps, if it lacks an appropriate frame; but no encasement of a genuine canvas ever approaches the value of the canvas. The art merchant might delude even genuine patronage by the substitution of clever counterfeit neatly framed. But he never does (or, indeed, very rarely will it be found so). He is honest. The theatre manager understands no such discernment in the true offices of the art store he is conducting. He is either wilfully or ignorantly dishonest in the management of his affairs. His commercialism, concentrated towards monopolistic control, abuses its true spirit and high offices, and makes art at all times subordinate to its avaricious demands. Today his stage is a tinsel frame, wherein he struts his plumed chromotypes. That he often receives genuine patronage does not mitigate the dishonesty of such purposed delusion.

Fifteen to twenty years ago there were many young actors and actresses beginning their careers in companies of distinction in "high-class repertoire," sur-

rounded by environments of revered traditions and artistic helpfulness that promised much for them, and, consequently, the future benefit they might lend to the American stage. The advantages then offered these young aspirants for a healthy growth, sane progress and ultimate efficiency in their chosen vocation were many, and, if wisely accepted, genuinely beneficial. Many had gained a still stronger advantage by early association with the truly worthy stock companies, then lingering firmly and maturely on their last footing, but soon to be weakened and finally knocked under by the incoming tread of commercialism. To sit at the feet of the great personages dominating the stage at that period, and to consciously (or by absorption), through emulation or otherwise, gain a simple knowledge of the great art of which these personages were the very vitality, was of no small consequence of itself alone; but add to that the profitable discipline of practical instruction, advice and constant association with such superior minds, and one can form some idea of what a pliable, willing and serious mould (aided later by matured individual mentality) might finally develop into. And at that time there were truly not a few at the beginning of careers that should have progressed to a height of distinguished attainment. But this was not to be.

And these players, whose best purposes have been so impeded, dwarfed, and finally immersed under the insurmountable wave of abnormal existence, who have become helpless through the inevitable process that turns them into the condition of *quantity*, to be increased or diminished in measure according to their immediate importance of commercial weight (and

who are lost to any further pecuniary advantage as speculative mediums for despotic injunction), must be the first to keenest sense (their chains of helpless subserviency broken, and themselves neglected and useless) the utter depravity of purpose, corruption of honesty, and depredation of art in such a process of histrionic kidnapping, and to which (in a sacrifice of ideals and the true spirit of emulation) they had so carelessly surrendered, but to walk the path of mushroom vanity, soon to find it only a slavish, ceaseless treadmill, dependent on a fixed machinery demanding mercenary profit only; its treadwork motionless, the hireling finds himself still where he had started.

The list of such histrionic aspirants was no mean one, and at the present time may be often readily recalled by noting the worthy, if late, efforts of some of its individuals to materialize the expectancy of their early hopes, or to continue the former condition of their interruptedness. No better proof can be offered of the decadency of the "first-class repertoire system," and a consequent detriment to art progress and dominant force in the present-day actor (incapacitating him from special usefulness in the stern and versatile exactions of a varied range of meritorious plays), than the generally popular and critical belief, after viewing these more recent efforts, of the inadequacy of the general support offered the star or stars attempting a re-establishment of their early repressed careers.

Notwithstanding, the era marking the beginning of a sudden extravagant attention to the matter of scenic and other auxiliary effects, even though often exceeding in importance that of the play and portrayal

(and sometimes abused through the mean offices and purposed counterfeit), can not be overlooked in a just estimate of its benefit to a then stubbornly neglected condition of advancement in that direction. It gave an impetus much needed, and, when honestly promulgated, worked indeed a revelation in the matters of care and attention to details, conditions that had truly become, through sullen neglect by many worthy stars, matters of shocking consequence. I believe that, as an import of ultimate grand good to the stage, this condition of superior production, when genuine, serves as no mean recompense for the marked decadency of the first-class repertoire system.

There exists, we know, in a popular form, catering to audiences in cities and towns not generally theatrical centres, a condition of commendable repertoire. We cannot deny that it fills an important part in districts not frequented by many of the better class attractions, and where the people cannot afford the luxury of the latter's scale of high prices. Many of these repertoire companies are of no small merit, and have occasionally graduated exceptionally proficient actors into positions of special note; but, notwithstanding, as most of them exist today, soliciting approval through most extraordinary methods, playing two performances a day at ridiculously low prices, and, moreover, endeavoring to meet the standard of the patronage received, we cannot with truthfulness say that they add any special distinction to the theatre, nor do they afford the proper medium through which an actor might hope to gain material and artistic advancement.

And, furthermore, they sometimes place to disadvantage first-class attractions by monopolizing the solicitation of the people's patronage previous to the advent of such a company. But such is not always the case. At other times these repertoire companies serve a good purpose by crowding out many of the innumerable, inferior combinations with incomplete productions, pretentious stars of feeble calibre, who haphazardly are continually dumping in and out of the smaller cities and towns of the country. These repertoire companies are far preferable to such, and in lieu of the small admission fee exacted, and the honest acquaintance they make to the people of their wares, cannot be said to forfeit any business integrity, nor falsely hold out any pledge of artistic superiority. Kept within the limitations of their self-exposed condition, they supply a benefit that cannot be gainsaid. But if transferred to the test of critical approval in a theatrical centre of any importance, they naturally must fail to justly realize, to a satisfactory degree, the exactions and expectancy of such a test, both through inadequacy of production, and individual artistic portrayal. They serve no recompense to offset, in any way, the condition of superior production that prevails in the truly meritorious one play combination system of today.

To bring about a rational adjustment of the commercial and artistic ends of the theatre it needs now the devoted individual strife of playwright and actor towards the established understanding of, and adherence to, a stipulated qualification for the practice of their arts, and a sense of stern business integrity, and constant acceptance, on the part of the manager, of

this stipulated qualification in playwright and actor, all working for a common exaltedness of the American stage. This could be well begun through the medium of the one play combination system of today if its advantages were honestly and wisely pursued.

Number eleven of "Stage Affairs," appearing March 26, 1907, concerns:

THE ONE PLAY COMBINATION SYSTEM.

**ITS ADVANTAGES FOR ART ACCOMPLISHMENT, IF WISELY
PURSUED.**

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ALLEN DAVENPORT.

XI.

THE ONE PLAY COMBINATION SYSTEM.

ITS ADVANTAGES FOR ART ACCOMPLISHMENT, IF WISELY
PURSUED.

I will not claim that, within the limited scope of its direct employment and results, the combination system of today is all that one might wish for to best accomplish a high exposition of the actor's art (far from it); but, considered with the prevailing stock system and decadent repertoire system, regarding the advantages offered for proper study, preparation and finish (and most particularly in respect to the opportunities and time afforded to pursue, in conjunction with his compulsory duties, the general ends and accomplishments of the actors' vocation), the combination system is, in my opinion, if wisely pursued, inestimably, and beyond any argumentative reasoning, of great benefit to, and opening possibilities of, positive and lasting good results for, the actor who would strive to best serve the profession of the theatre.

Granting the possession of talent, a serious purpose, and a ready inclination to work, seeming im-

possibilities may be accomplished by the proper application of a constant, concentrated, progressive use of these forces. Actors and actresses, especially the great "multitude" (of course there are some exceptions), apply their energy and talent solely to the immediate exhibition of their skill. The fact that any significant part properly studied (even with no view to playing it) must enhance to some degree the momentary condition of employed activity, seldom if ever demands from them a thought or care. The immediate remuneration is quite all the concern they know. Sight-seeing, sociableness, cards and permeable literature consume a good proportion of their leisure hours. There would be no special cause for censure were they disposed to turn some time and attention to a serious consideration and pursuit of the study of the art they still would fain profess. But that is a condition seldom to be found in the cast of a travelling combination. And yet these majority leisure hours, if properly employed, can be made the preparatory stages and firm stepping-stones to great possibilities of future permanence in art development, and its consequent just remuneration.

The stock actor of today, transferring his base of operation to the combination system, argues thus: "I simply had to; two a day (meaning performances) for the last —— years, why — it's fierce! just live in the theatre, that's all. I had to get out on the road." Before the season is over the chances are that this same actor (meditating on the condition of decreased remuneration and increased expenditure, obscured, perhaps, in an uncongenial part, wearied of long jumps and night stands, maybe) will be

heard to say: "Never again for me; back to stock and my two a day. It's not so bad in the big cities, but when you're up against these "burgs" (isolated cities and towns), why — it's fierce! on the train, in the hotel, or at the theatre — a dog's life." To this type of actor (and he predominates today) it is indeed a "beastly existence," and the theatre business truly a "fierce proposition." And so he vacillates between the two conditions, and cannot, even through an evident preference for the former, add (because of its abnormal practices) any merited distinction to either its offices, or to his own importance; and in his restless invasion and withdrawal from the latter had not attempted, and cared not, to wisely employ his idle moments.

The instrumentalist deems it expedient and highly necessary at all times to maintain a continual practice of the medium essential to the highest manifestation of his art. Especially is this true in a wise contemplation and use of his idle moments. It is a drudgery necessary to all ambitions if success is to be reached. But the vast multitude of actors (with few exceptions) observe a contrary rule; they as consistently disregard (or misunderstand) the value of these idle moments, and unpardonably so when unemployed and fretting for something to turn up. There is no excuse for this. While engaged in the actual routine of the travelling combination, there might be shown at times, perhaps, some leniency in this lapse of duty (through occasional hardships in travel and incommodious living), nevertheless it is an indisputable fact that, even so, the idle moments are many and continuous in which, were he so dis-

posed, the actor might strive continually for an ultimate high state of proficiency in his art, instead of resting content, as he mostly does, on a seeming determined indifference to any such exalted aims.

Today the vocation of the actor is too seldom taken seriously by its own kind. The theatre too often becomes, not a "work" house, but rather a "play" house for the delectation of the actors' amusement, often to the disadvantage of the rightful claimant to his divertive faculty. During the preparation of a play, and at rehearsals, a compulsory self-interest, if nothing more, naturally effects a needful seriousness to a desirable general benefit. But I refer to his disposition after these preparatory stages are over, as a member of a travelling combination, while in the theatre and during the progress of the play. In justice to the actor let us state that he is often obliged to suffer many discomforts, hindrances, and annoyances in some of the theatres wherein he must play (often theatres of foremost importance) as regards stages, dressing-rooms, and sanitary conditions. In many theatres in America today the above conditions are of the most unsuitable, incommodious and foul proportions. The employer who had subjected his workmen to offices of such offensiveness would receive their just indignation and severest censure for such inhumanity. It is true that there is a low type of actor who is not particularly careful at all times of the managers' property, and wilfully abuses well-ordered conveniences. Such degradation points to a need of stern reformation effecting a more careful discrimination in the now too ill-reasoned condition of engaging men and women for such a truly respect-

able and highly intellectual vocation. But neither the manager's negligence nor the actor's depravity can excuse either in a heedless deviation from a just conception of their rightful obligations each to the other.

I have said that the vocation of the actor is too seldom seriously pursued. There is a reason for this not wholly to the ignominy of the actor. The business manager of today (the dominant type) is, for the most part, a person void of any beautiful idea of the institution he conducts. He will not even recognize it as a legitimate business. He does not, perhaps, proclaim this fact on the street corners, to his audiences, or even to his acquaintances; but, nevertheless, through constant instances in daily contact with his subsidiary servants, he voluntarily declares his trade an illegitimate one. "You can't do things the same as you can in a legitimate business—the show business is different." That is this particular manager's unshaken estimate of the institution he conducts. It is different only in that he makes it so. A few of the type of reputable managers still remain. Many have been literally forced, by this present-day method of procedure, out of the enjoyment of any further profit to the public or to themselves. Some have deteriorated to menial positions under the irregular practices of the dominant type that is now seeing the decadent heights of its gluttonous excesses. Void of any healthy views concerning the business balance of the theatre (which is their special charge, and which they importantly conduct as such), how could they be expected to understand and maintain in any different view the exhibits, material (and exposition of

same) necessary to the promotion of such trade? The man who is going to do a dishonest business won't bother to stock his store with honest goods. And if he finds honest goods already there, they become in his hands of like consequence to the purposed uses of the rest.

Today the actor who is devotedly honest and serious in his art finds no relative just reward in the common estimation of the manager. He becomes of similar importance with the illiterate, charlatanical trifle; one who often finds the readier favor with managerial irregularity, which latter condition must sometimes surrender to the former's retaliatory bombast, being equally armed with the same common weapons of ignorance, dishonesty and nervy push, and wielding them often with superior emphasis. Consequently the actor laboring for his art finds small encouragement and little sympathy. If he would remain he must truly (as I have said before) sacrifice intellectuality, temperament, and even manhood to hold his position. Even more! It is not in his nature always to retaliate. It is beneath him so to do. The manager often understands such only to be a lack of moral courage, and adds advantage to his side. It is true that really worthy players forfeit their ideals and emulative tendencies, and find it "wisdom," or seemingly do, to fawn and cringe to not endanger the prolongation of their contracted agreement.

A cultured, polished gentleman and capable actor of thoroughly artistic tastes once said to me, when I had assumed a pertinent attitude of defence against one of the most consummate fakirs the office of stage management has ever seen (this was in a company



of the highest repute): "Very ill-advised; I have learned that I must go over in the corner and put my head in a bucket of water, if they direct me to." The next season this gentleman was retained in the company, but with scarcely a speaking part. Two seasons later he was away from it altogether. Totally submerged by its water bucket environments. Several seasons have intervened, and he has never re-plunged this much coveted reservoir of bucket propensities. This same company contained many such similar cases. There are many such cases of similar companies.

But to continue our argument concerning the advantages which the combination system affords the studiously inclined actor. Combinations of first-class standing seldom play more than eight performances in a week. Four hours (at the very outside, four hours and a half) is the time occupied by the actor in discharging the actual duties of his office. It is often less than four hours. An average of six working hours a day for six days in a week would cover a full estimate of the actor's compulsory obligation in the routine of a well-regulated combination. One can readily see the vast opportunity open to the actor for a continual effort to improve his condition and his art, even if he devoted no more than an hour or two each day to the task.

Of course the actor is often obliged to spend extra time at the theatre rehearsing. These rehearsals, although sometimes justly exacted and through real necessity, are, nevertheless, many times merely the presumptuous summons of supererogatory stage managers; although perhaps dictating at the even more arrogant command of some "featured" individual,

who, thoroughly inefficient, and under continual petulance at the lack of outside adulatory notice, commensurate with steadily focussed self-regardfulness, and dimmed by a company receiving public and critical preference, seeks an outlet for this ill-temper (thereby adding a self-inflicted aggravation) by fretfully enduring, in common with those unjustly taxed, the like penalty of a useless rehearsal. Or the summons may come from the discontented manager, who, hardened to (or ignorant of) any true appreciation of the actors' importance, views the situation only from the unsatisfactory box-office returns. And sometimes, and by no means infrequently, these unjust demands issue from the contemptible supposition that rehearsals are really necessary in order to keep in check any disposition on the part of the actor to assume a condition of undue self-esteem that might perhaps lead to something more alarming. Then there is the dreaded summons by the author-manager. Unless he be a person of dignified prominence, truly gifted, conscious of man's fallability, in short, a really superior playwright, there will be no adverse criticism of his composition that cannot be readily laid to the incompetency of the individual efforts of his company. The foamy pomposity and exposed vacuity of such persons is indeed pitiable in their endeavors to seek out of chaff nutritious material. Here the rehearsal becomes a thing of imposture and criminal exhaustion.

A properly constructed play that has been adequately and thoroughly rehearsed by a skilled hand becomes, like a piece of machinery or a clock, well-ordered mechanism. It needs adjusting and regu-

lating from time to time, it is true, but constant tinkering by the unskilled hand, as with machinery and a clock, can only clog and impede its proper functions. I have known such a play to progress throughout a season without a rehearsal (except the few occasioned by an unavoidable change in the cast), and steadily to the betterment every way of the play and actor. To harass, harangue and fatigue by constant tinkering, the necessary agents that keep in motion the playwright's model, only uselessly wastes the tissues of those agents, and materially impairs the model itself. I am not speaking of the play in the hands of the skilled, experienced and just regulator. Notwithstanding, even with the addition of important (or unimportant) rehearsals, the certain necessity of travel and its resultant condition of fatigue, the actor playing in the combination still has many idle moments full of golden opportunity to materially advance him in his art. That he does not generally accept such is a matter of no small consequence in estimating the continual decadency of histrionic art and the high designs of the theatre.

I have mentioned (in justice to the actor) some of the annoyances and indignities he is often subjected to while a member of a travelling combination. Granting that today in some companies there does not exist a condition of such unnecessary friction (but they are few), even so, wherein does the actor specially merit from the manager — through any individual marked effort on his part to benefit his own condition, and so to more fittingly serve that manager who places in the actor's hands a partial power at least to make or mar the material of his invest-

ment — a deeper respect, higher dignity, and greater consideration than that degree of questionable consequence which is now allotted him? If the manager in a general estimate thinks that "all actors are alike," and looks upon them as vacillating, capricious, unreliable persons, and engages them only to supply the immediate commercial necessity, — property readily obtained, and as easily dispensed with, — it is also true that the actor today, commonly estimating the manager, views him with no less doubting mind, believing with equal firmness that "all managers are alike," and that they, too, are merely commercial necessities, but quite reversely — troublesome to obtain, and hard to be dispensed with.

It is the positive existence of this dual condition today (a tendency of both manager and actor to doubt the other's sincerity, and to view with skepticism the actions and motives of the other) that deprives the institution of the theatre of an essential co-harmonious effort quite necessary for the highest approximate attainment of idealism, without the possession of which no mission can ever be at most properly fulfilled. That spirit of endeavor that moves and urges one on to a constant strife for the attainment of the highest condition possible in any chosen worthy walk of life.

In America today this cannot be truthfully said of the vast multitude of actors that are daily squeezing and being pushed in and out of the ranks of the countless non-purposed companies that almost hourly are being precipitated into an already much overcrowded field of activity. It is this enormous overbalancing majority condition which holds no settled

understanding of the best intentions of the theatre, nor seeks to find one, that mostly goes to make up the grand totality of the actor's profession. Each individual, in his heedlessness of any attainment of high things in his vocation, strikes as great a blow for its impoverishment as, in a proper carefulness, he might strike for its enrichment. The advantages for such are innumerable to the actor engaged in the travelling combination.

The hours afforded for study, mental improvement, constant progression towards artistic finish in the art of the actor are constantly at hand. If it does not lie within the self-reliant possibilities of his individual understanding, there are other means at hand to establish some settled form, some fundament, some sort of system of procedure through which to develop the art he deigns to practise. There certainly are treatises of enough conviction on which to base a plan of study. There are truly worthy professors of oratory, dramatic expression, and their adjunctive essentials. They are at least available during the vacation days. One may return again to them. The instrumentalist seldom stops at one master. He seeks many. In the hour of his greatest achievement he is still a student.

Why should the actor, playing upon the most divine of instruments, the human body, rest content upon the mere supposition that within that body lies, unaided by any special concentration of mentality, development of expression, or cultivation of speech, the intuitive instincts to reproduce the varied and lofty types of superior humanity? Perhaps at our birth a vocation may be given us; but it is in our individual

self to make that vocation what the best forces of nature through character, energy and cultivation are capable of attaining. That can only be done by a serious respect for the vocation, a devotion to its best aims, and willing drudgery. There is no condition of the theatre so open to great possibilities for the employment of these stipulations as is apparent in the combination system of today.

Number twelve of "Stage Affairs," appearing April 2, 1907, concerns:

THE DRAMATIC SCHOOL.

ITS FUTILE RESULTS.

APR 10 1907
A series of fifteen pamphlets issued weekly on Tuesdays
from January 15 to April 23, inclusive

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STAGE AFFAIRS IN AMERICA TODAY

BY

ALLEN DAVENPORT



BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

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- No. 11. The One Play Combination System. Its Advantages for Art Accomplishment, If Wisely Pursued.

Stage Affairs in America Today.

—BY—

ALLEN DAVENPORT.

XII.

THE DRAMATIC SCHOOL.

ITS FUTILE RESULTS.

There are some academies of dramatic art in America, which in a wishful serious intention to prepare men and women for the profession of acting, possess many virtues. They employ studies with fundamental principles, expounding to a creditable degree, through stages of proper progression, a general outline of the expressions chiefly to be employed in the art of acting. These schools certainly do no positive harm; and would, perhaps (if sought by men and women possessed with a desire to work patiently through a more extended course of instruction), accomplish worthy things, if—provided a fitting medium reciprocating, fostering and maintaining, to a substantial degree, the preparatory intentions of such academies, colleges, schools of oratory and dramatic art, and so eventually might prove of some positive benefit to the institution of the theatre and the true cause of dramatic art.

There is another class, however, a vile abomination masquerading under the name—school of acting. At the head is generally to be found a man or a woman, retired, often forced from active service, now seeking a living by ruthlessly transmitting to stage-struck men and women (under the guise of dramatic instruction) the mannerisms, defects, ignorance and (often times) illiteracy,—baneful conditions that “years of experience” have generally magnified the more,—of himself (or herself), and untutored assistants, not hardly one of whom has ever had a respectful care for the true significance of the art of acting. And they form the faculty, if I may ab-use the term, of a school of dramatic art. These schools generally charge a tuition fee of about four hundred dollars for a term of six months’ duration, three hundred of which must be deposited in advance, the other one hundred at the expiration of one-half of the term. Did these schools accomplish anything towards advancing the pupil to a desirable preparatory state to enter the profession of acting, we would have little to say; but they do not, and it is unreasonable to suppose they ever could.

I know from personal acquaintance, and through information gained from many of the pupils (by their voluntary confessions), the existing conditions in these schools. An instructor in one volunteered this brazen conviction:—“I’ll tell you how I handle ’em. I stand ’em up in front of me, and say,—now you act and talk just as though you were in your own parlor,—that’s all acting is.” Confessions from the pupils of these schools verified the above statement. The “methods” of other instructors are equally as incomplete

and wholly dependent on the pupil's crude aptness. They provide themselves with play books; parts are assigned to them, and they are given to understand that in the mere confused rehearsing of them they are getting a practical sufficient preparatory stage training in the ridiculously short space of a few months, in ill-fitting environments, and under the willing direction of men and women who, of course, must know too well the presumptuousness and impossibility of any one attempting, under such conditions, to impart a preparatory knowledge even of the art of the actor.

These schools are glaring examples of obtaining money under false pretences, and of the unreasoned actions of many men and women to quickest feed their feverish germs of "stage struckness." In the majority of cases, young men and women who enter these schools are literally defrauded of their money, and finally left as destitute of an immediate prospect of a stage career as though they had never forsook the cheery comforts of home, then minus these comforts plus the unavoidable discommodiousness and disturbances of boarding house life. Or else, and more to be censured and less to be pitied, they miss their sole purpose in courting one of these schools,—to get on the stage, not to study a great art.

To become proficient in the arts men and women must prepare and study for years to gain such advancement, and to attain a desired finish to their studious efforts. Acting is an art! Its incumbents carve the inscription—artist. Yet what do they studiously endure to deserve it? The sculptor, the painter, the musician, the instrumentalist pass years in study to

rightfully claim the appellation—artist. They must possess natural inclinations for their art of course, but where that stops their work begins, if they would become artists in the cultured sense of the term. To be sure it is not always necessary to study to be able to play “tunes” and “jigs”; but you must if you want to play something more. The stage is strewn with men and women who can play only “tunes” and “jigs,”—and then not always do they play in tune. Such have no right to profess an art of which they have no careful knowledge, nor ambition to seek the means to procure one, nor even a desire to so do!

Over twenty years ago a movement was started in America to “reform the drama.” Its immediate scene of action was at a theatre in the vicinity of Broadway and Twenty-third street, New York City. This reform was to be effected principally through the instilling into the incumbents of the company at this theatre, and the pupils of its preparatory school, the teachings of a truly great philosopher, and his discovery and revelations of laws governing man’s expressions. The direct intent of the introduction of this system (as opposed to established methods of other theatres) was, to quote from an official on the business staff of the first named theatre, to pit “brains against experience—intelligence against traditions”; and its confident hope was, to again quote and now from an authority in the art department of this theatre,—“the development of a new stock of actors”; and to quote further, “the novice accomplishes now in two years what was done by the old actor in fifteen years.” Here let me say that the mention of this system is intended only in so far as

it may serve to the more fittingly connect the facts I am about to state, and not in any manner intended to gainsay the inestimable value of that great teacher's wonderful revelations when viewed as philosophy, and pursued as such.

Employed under the proprietorship of this theatre, as its executive head, was a gentleman who has since risen to notorious individual distinction in the affairs of the American stage. He was assisted by his two brothers, one of whom today shares at least an equal, if not a greater position of distinction than the one first mentioned. It may be truly said that the greater part of the history of the "theatrical doings" of the last twenty years in America is the history of the "ventures" of these two gentlemen. The stage manager of this theatre (and what the term truly implies) was a talented personage, who today stands, in the true significance of the word, a stage manager pre-eminent: and in so far as his judgment and practice has allowed him to proceed, an exceedingly wise one, in that he ever unerringly selects foundational colors secure enough upon which to rest the textures of his varied technical and architectural skill.

In connection with this theatre was another gentleman—cultured, learned; working (as we have no doubt) ideally, honestly and enthusiastically at that time. He was termed "dramatic director," and also "dramatic scientist." This gentleman had (to quote again),—"the sympathy and co-operation" of the proprietor and the executive head of this theatre. Since the inception of that theatre, in its honest purpose to "reform the drama," and up to the present hour, this

gentleman has been virtually (if earlier with an occasional change of base) at the head of an academy of dramatic arts, and receiving throughout its existence,—“the sympathy and co-operation” of the great power which has held for many years, by its managerial prominence, the best patronage which the theatre can boast. Into the channel of this controlling power, this much coveted medium for histrionic endeavor, might freely enter and abound,—the “brains” that were to offset “experience,” the “intelligence” that was to take the place of “traditions,”—conditions which were to effect in time “the development of a new stock of actors.”

Throughout the evolution of this movement begun over twenty years ago to “reform the drama,” and to the present time, not one name of any special worth or permanent continuance has been supplied through the medium of such academy of dramatic arts fostered by the sympathetic and co-operate help of the most prominent and energetic managerial force of the time. The many names of histrionic splendor that illumined the daily records of the stage at the inception of this reformation of the drama have mostly passed on to stage history, and there inerasable stand, casting honor and distinction on the American stage by the highest development of their talents attained through rightfully pursued long experience, and a sane adherence to the best traditions properly adjusted to the present environments, constantly promoted and bettered by a rational application of “brains” and “intelligence” put to their highest uses at all times. They required learning; they became scholars,—self-thoughtful, educated men and women.

“The development of a new stock of actors” by dramatic science, wherein “the novice accomplishes now in two years” by brains and intelligence “what was done by the old actor in fifteen years” by experience and traditions, has not been accomplished; the desired resultant condition of these combined forces working in “sympathy and co-operation” is not in any way apparent. A new stock may have been developed, but it exists only in a degenerate state of histrionic ancestry in its inefficiency to cope with the brain exertions and thoughtful intelligence necessary to strengthen experience and to properly adjust the present conditions to the best traditions of the stage in an adequate exposition of dramatic art.

If this bond of “sympathy and co-operation” has been an honest one there can be no disgrace in the failure of its purposes. But if one part of its stipulate force, in its flight for ideals and reformation in the drama, may have surrendered and succumbed to the managerial conduct of its sympathetic and co-operate ally, knowing the impossibility of promoting and advancing art through the channels of that ally’s supreme spirit of commercial monopoly, then such an academy of dramatic arts is no more than an institution advertising and existing first and all-important for mere pecuniary gain, draining into the cesspool of degenerate histrionism any willing substance that may be caught in the vortex of its commercial whirl. Its mission, speaking through its non-resultant effects, has become worthless; and through its inability to regenerate a worthy stock of actors, bespeaks its unfitness either way,—through the failure of its honest endeavors to carry out

its original design, or through its subservience to an improper medium into which it may graduate its pupils,—and holds no boast to any reformation of the drama.

The so-called “school of dramatic art,” the very essence of hopeless futility, should be declaimed into the refuse of its self-spoken worthlessness!

Number thirteen of “Stage Affairs” appearing April 9, 1907, concerns:

ACTING.

ITS TANGIBILITY AS AN ART TO BE STUDIED.

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BY

ALLEN DAVENPORT



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- XII. The Dramatic School: Its Futile Results.

Stage Affairs in America Today.

—BY—

ALLEN DAVENPORT.

XIII.

ACTING.

ITS TANGIBILITY AS AN ART TO BE STUDIED.

Before there can be a truly great national drama, American dramatists must first learn a true significance of the barbaric nobility and crude splendor of its original natural occupancy, of its valiant struggle against the usurpation of unequally equipped civilization. It must justly view through the epochs of Columbus, Washington and Lincoln the evolution of the stern necessities then essential to fittingly expose, uplift, and finally apply the early latent, unencouraged, but significantly founded, intellectuality of this primitive and rightful claimant to its land. Find in that source an idealism for true exaltedness, stripped of the patois inconsequence, the sole physical heroism that has ever cheapened its best possibilities, and give to it a *language*, that it may bespeak through a pointed *diction*, the loftiest motives and deeds of its noblest people and foremost individual personages. We may then see for our country the possible worthiness of

its perpetuity in the records of valuable dramaturgy. I am speaking, of course, from the standpoint of a highest understood knowledge of the true importance of our theatre.

The American play of today for the most part caricatures Americanism. It finds much favor, it is true, particularly in congested populations; it amuses most generally, perhaps. Although in the districts whose people it caricatures it is often severely criticised and many times censured and ridiculed for its impudent exaggerations, still even there it amuses and exhilarates by the sole fact of its sauciness; but this is not the American play. Nor does it consist in the squabbling exposition of squalid disturbances of oppressing opulency, and ignorant understanding of justifiable competence; nor in the unbalanced prejudices of our great national crises. The national drama lies in the idealizing and justly balancing of the virtues and vices of its truly important periods and personages, their events and deeds, through the intellectuality, elegance and effectualness of simplicity, intermediary and sublimity in the *diction* of its native tongue.

Today the American playwright transplaces common incidents and types of everyday existence to the environed illusiveness of the stage. It is no severe task to so do; and it is no special consequence to interpret such. Everyday life is crowded with individuals possessing dramatic instincts, capable in their crude origin of interpreting such commonplace. And yet, this limited natural endowment is, generally speaking, in America to-day the accepted standard of an estimation of the art of acting. In the name of traditioned achievements and witnessed art

in true histrionic ability, the gods forbid that it should forever so remain.

Not long ago a foremost player, one annually touring this country, spoke upon the subject, "The Art of Acting." His discourse was afterwards, in an improved state, published. When all was said, it might be summed up thus: That after all, as compared with other arts, there was nothing tangible to acting, and — that "actors, like poets, are born, not made." A direct contradiction, it would seem to me, to the title of the subject matter of his discourse. Considerably more than ten years ago this actor essayed one of the great classic roles. At that time, as well as now, he was enjoying truly deserved popularity in a line of interesting parts. Much concern was manifested in his ambitious departure from well trodden paths. In critical opinion and in public expectancy, he failed totally. On the evening of the second performance, before the play proceeded, he called the principal members of the company to his dressing room, and (unheeding of the well-meant criticism and advice bestowed) admonished his associates that, notwithstanding the unmerciful "slating" received, they "must have the courage of their convictions." He travelled to another city. The same result. He finally defied fate in the great theatrical centre of all. His failure was complete. Since that time, many years ago, I have not known of his essaying any role of truly classic distinction.

He is an actor endowed by nature for the stage; let us confess — a born actor. Resonant, sonorous (yet flexible and mellow) voice, classic mould of features. Physical proportions of beautiful natural symmetry, free from defects and deformities. He

possesses repose, elegance and energy. Although endowed by nature to adorn the poetic, classic drama, he could not even approximate the test; he did not (we will say) supply the *art*, without which all the attributes of nature were naught. And now today he recognizes nothing tangible in the art of acting. No, "actors, like poets, are born, not made."

If we are willing to accept every kind and condition of rhymster and versifier who heedlessly heaps his untutored, illiterate musings on our heads, and so proclaim him poet, then indeed may the actor with justification find in his untaught condition an equal claim to ready consideration. But I do not believe it is so adjudged, although the art of poesy has too long been left to sad neglect, and indiscriminately made a mart for wanton cunning to ply his trade. This type of both poet and actor has quite long enough boasted a "corner" in the "divine gift" market. The genuine poet must be the scholar, ardent student, profound thinker. Therein reposes, immovable, his true greatness. It is that learning, that mental discipline, which transforms invention and fancy into transcendental verse. Merely a prismatic reflex tinge of that richly founded storehouse, learning, running off into tints of infinite poetic beauty. That is art. The art of poesy. It is that same quality of scholarly, studious, profound thoughtfulness, disciplined mental concentration, that must equally predominate in every strife for histrionic splendor.

I shall herein briefly expose the method of procedure of this worthy player just now mentioned, regarding the production of the classic play then under consideration. This estimable actor and gentleman personally directed, with automatical autocracy, all his

players. His prompt book was arranged from the "first folio" edition of the play, which, it is generally conceded, abounds in misprints, and words whose obsolescence become, in a stubborn retention of them, matters of absurdity and indiscretion in a present-day production of any play wherein they originally appeared. The parts distributed to the players were typewritten ones, and badly done at that. But the appearance (at rehearsals?) of any printed edition of the play was, regarding the possessor, a cause for instant censure and admonition against further offending. The rehearsals to this great classic play were conducted precisely as if it had been a modern composition, in that it was continually and vitally altered and re-altered in text and "business" from the day of the first rehearsal to the very last moment preceding the opening performance. Such conditions, especially in the preparation of a standard work, are abominable, unwise, and totally unnecessary.

But another matter wholly eclipsed this state of wasteful energy and nerve force. It was the glaring unpreparedness in the company to meet in any degree at all the simplest exactions of this universally popular classic. And in this state of unpreparedness, the one most particularly soliciting favor and patronage stood a self-evincing culprit, albeit he earnestly avowed that he had made of the part a life study. The rendition of the diction, and the determining and employing of stage "business," was very largely a matter of chance. No attempt to essay a character of such truly classic distinction could succeed, nor should it deserve to, when the chief factor to its highest exposition had formed no settled knowledge of the possibilities and essential force of its *elocu-*

tionary importance. The whole play was arranged for performance as at the first might have been any of the modern ones contained in the repertoire of this born actor.

No one was ever truly great through nature's gifts alone. The highest knowledge of their possession, and the energy to righteously pursue them, alone could make him so. To that end we must accept some tangible form, and become a slave in our fidelity to its teachings, if we would wish to attain true exaltedness. The above notable case is but one of many among those enjoying high distinction in the theatre who repudiate any system or suggestion that could be employed to establish the art of acting on a tangible basis.

Inspiration is the compensation the work makes for an earnest, ardent love and devotion to it. Success is in sitting down to it, going at it, and sticking to it until you arrive at something. Through steadily concentrated energy, perseverance and patience it proclaims the genius. Rational minds now discard all sentiment regarding a ready acceptance of the mystical phrases — "divine gift from Above," and "inspiration from Heaven." These beliefs have long stayed true greatness from a just appreciation, and too often dethroned its solid majesty to lightly place thereon instead the blustering actions of ill-applauded, dazzling pretence.

Art accomplishment (and I believe every kind of workmanship) is the reducing to some use by a fittingly regulated physical medium an imaged purpose of the consciousness; each receiving its realization through the mind's activity. That purpose may have been conceived for good or for evil. The quality

of importance assumed by the thing so developed depends upon the degree of energy exercised by the force employed to finally materialize the imaged original; that force is—the mind, the power speeding the inner and outer functions to the consummation of the former's conception and the latter's workmanship. In proportion to its native soundness will this original conception, if *properly developed*, be felt in its ultimate beneficence. And the reverse may be said if its origin is malicious. Neither the force of physical energy nor the purpose of the soul can develop clear through a sordid mind. There is as much opportunity for immorality in art as in anything else, if the mind directs the way.

Mentality commands art as it does every high motivated trait of human endeavor. The only difference is in the medium to be used to effect their highest development. Some impulsive desire frets restlessly in every soul waiting to burst into some sphere of activity. It often unrestrainedly obeys such impulse, and then, like an illy regulated electric current, not only mars the controlling mediums meant to check such impulsiveness, but also irretrievably dissipates the force itself. Unrestrained, impulsive dramatic instincts (fretful desires for histrionic display) should, before allowed to act, find ready a well regulated medium to guard against any tendency towards an impetuous, exaggerated, and over-emphasized essayal in the dangerous freedom of their crude origin—apparatuses dispensing to the best purposes the power they control. To try to handle the vital electric fluid with one's bare hands is dangerous. So it is to think of manipulating the indefinable source of dramatic instinct without effecting regulators to distribute it.

To apply rules which shall specially (or generally) govern physical manifestations of emotions and passions, such as — agony, exasperation, joy, sorrow, courage, fear, rage, suspicion, love, reflection, modesty, shame, respect, veneration, malice, scorn, surprise, horror, defiance, grief, convulsiveness, laughter, despair, melancholy, terror, wonder, contempt, hate, adoration, imbecility, death, etc., etc., etc. — is as impracticable and damaging to the highest possibilities of dramatic expression as would be the application of set rules to the free development of the innumerable combinations of musical harmonies so irrevocably necessary to the loftiest attainment of music sound expression. It is in the existence of this unrestrained condition in which the unlimited variations, combinations and possibilities of expressions are left open to the mentally controlled imagination (with its afforded inspiration, if you wish) of the actor, that the vital strength and endurance of his art lives and thrives. It is in the highest understanding, development and perfection of the medium of this expression that must give the intellectual, graceful and effective finish to any art expression. All differences of mediums have one common fundament — mentality! It is in a correct settlement of such fundament, and a proper progression and development, through a sustained systematic application of it, to an approximate state of finish, that *qualifies* one to a justifiable practice of that art as a profession. The elevation of the stage, at the present hour, is a simple fact of *organization*, and — a significant *qualification*. To guarantee a general condition of stability and confidence, such qualification should be attendant on the broad opportunities of *preceptorial higher education*.

The mere sense of expression (or poetic feeling) never vivified marble nor canvas. A skilful and artistic knowledge of a proper use of the instruments to be employed in the manifestation of expression (or poetic feeling) must be acquired before it can be possible to beautifully reveal any sense of expression. This should apply to the art of acting as well. The fact that in acting the likeness is revealed, not through inanimate substance, but animate being, promotes and encourages the belief that acting cannot be equally classified with the other fine arts, and that its exposition is almost wholly a matter of untrained natural endowments, into which must become immersed the character to be portrayed, instead of a highly cultivated state of the medium of expression, *the human body*, made ready and fit to adapt itself to all modes and forms of expression, and concealing by this art its very self in the character type portrayed. Thus we find a general misapplication of the instrument of expression in acting, and the realms of art usurped by the personality, whims and caprices of the actor.

Criticism on acting is largely given from the viewpoint of the mere observed effect, and not from any special knowledge of particular insight into technicalities governing the medium or instrument of expression. Therefore actors having parts fitting them well, and blessed with personal charms, mannerisms and peculiarities readily adaptable to such parts, if they can but maintain a proper degree of self control and be natural, that is, play themselves, their success immediately therein is assured. But set them to the task of creating types, or essaying to attain proficiency in superior types of nobility and eloquent grandeur, they conspicuously fail. Here even the invaluable

and seldom accredited assistance of the genuine art of wig maker and costumer cannot poultice the form into histrionic healthiness. To be endowed by nature with rare personal charms, exceptional voice, and graceful bearing is unquestionably of undisputed value, but of no permanent worth if not regulated and skilfully applied through an intelligent cultivation of the instruments which manifest these qualities.

But it is not necessary to know our organism to understand and exhibit our art. Technical training in art is not to give freedom to the soul that it may properly manifest its workings; it is to control that freedom that it may not over or understate its manifestations. Thus it becomes art. A violin player need not know the construction of his violin, his bow,—the laws governing the vibratory causes and effects of his technical skill; mental philosophy, psychology, and so on; these are not necessary to an effectual exposition of his skill. The highest degree of philosophical research still places unlimited possibilities ahead. They must, of course, prove helpful, and are sought by the student artist after the essential fundamentals have been firmly settled. The human body is the actor's instrument of expression. He plays upon that. He should not enter upon a stage career of serious purpose without the possession of a properly attuned instrument capable of adequately responding to the skill of the trained performer. No self-respecting instrumentalist would deign to engage in an exhibition of his skill unless in the possession of a fitly made instrument capable of displaying his highest technical skill at least, and permitting at the same time of the most exalted manifestations of vari-

able expression in that degree to which his mentally controlled imagination, emotional power, and such qualities may lead him. No untrained person should be allowed to go upon the stage! It is not so held in America today. The actor's vocation is never a profession,—it is not often a business, although beset as such; it is not even a livelihood. The actor of today is, in general self-evinced proclivities, a vagrant, petty speculator. But he owes much of this depravity to the unmitigated indifference of the dominant manager of today to any just regard of his true mission in the conduction of his trade.

It is true that there have been flashed upon the world at times untutored great histrionic personages, some possessing startling physical and vocal deformities, eccentricities and woful mannerisms. Such ones will always find a place independent of any condition or regulation governing the special sphere in which they shine. But even with such the time came when they were obliged to possess acknowledged controlment of the causes and effects of their unregulated forces, and become studious and learned, duly tempered, or else be early consumed in the focus of their fiery brilliancy. To what tremendous grandeur of enduring possibilities these quick blossoming, showy, but soon failing flowers might have reached had some discipline been early settled and rightly directed, to be later developed by the individual greatness through studiousness and concentrated energy! This may seem mere speculation to many, but to any thoughtful person, such an advantage (to the one seriously inclined, devotedly attached, and ambitiously moved) must be seen to be of untold benefit and lasting endurance.

America today is leading in the importance of world affairs. It is supplying all walks of life with strong personages. It is providing prodigious means for educational help in all these walks. Unlimited beneficence is being graciously bestowed to promote and maintain that which is truly worthy of assistance. The arts are not being wholly neglected. The theatre might gain securely a place upon the list of these beneficiaries. But to do so it must be found worthy in purpose, true to the best possible ends of that purpose, and honestly and consistently conducted through some significant *qualification!*

Number fourteen of "Stage Affairs," appearing April 16, 1907, concerns:

SHAKESPEARE,

THE FUTURE HIGHEST VALUE OF HIS PLAYS TO THE
STAGE.

1907
A series of fifteen pamphlets issued weekly on Tuesdays
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APRIL 16, 1907

STAGE AFFAIRS IN AMERICA TODAY

BY

ALLEN DAVENPORT



BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

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Previous Issues of "Stage Affairs."

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- XII. The Dramatic School: Its Futile Results.
- XIII. Acting: Its Tangibility as an Art to be Studied.

Stage Affairs in America Today.

—BY—

ALLEN DAVENPORT.

XIV.

SHAKESPEARE,

THE FUTURE HIGHEST VALUE OF HIS PLAYS TO THE
STAGE.

“To hold — (*as't were*) — the mirror up to nature; to show — virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and — the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.”

This was, is, and ever will be, the *essence* of the teaching that Shakespeare imparted and bequeathed to the men and women of the stage,—the manager, the playwright, the actor,—the co-essential union which, in its co-efficient, co-harmonious plan, constitutes the highest standard of the institution of the theatre.

And therein lies, moreover, the spirit of every text that has invariably forced its way into all discourses of any consequence which have ever been written or spoken concerning the “art of acting.”

Therein is revealed a duty, a religion, a system of procedure, (you might call it a faith, a worship if you wished) for the beneficent institution of the theatre, and to those devoted men and women who would truthfully send its mission forth to the world.

Therein exists a *tangible formula*, which, when evolved into a system, significantly founded, consistently followed, and sincerely revered, would truly establish a condition of *qualification* for the profession of the theatre as beneficial, vast and lasting as that of any other vocation known to the world, not excepting that of the church. With common sense meaning one might say that in a religious adoption of such a system lay—the redemption and salvation of the theatre.

Nearly all the truly great achievements in the theatre have been found in the *union* of this *trinity* force (playwright-manager-actor) in some surpassing individuality. In all which has been worthiest has ever been seen a continual strife to gain, through studious inclining and thoughtful concentration, some eventual recognition in the poetic classic drama,—and most distinctly in the plays of Shakespeare. If therein lies the strength of all which has been best and enduring in the theatre, it would seem to be no more nor less than common sense, and practicably tangible, to methodically head and navigate on such “dead reck’ning.” The predominant educational possibilities of such disciplinary learning can not with truthfulness be gainsaid. And when you have secured a *qualified* graduation, a degree, for such trained instruction, you have in all dignity insured an undeniable “status” for such scholarly progression, where indeed all such possessory owners may truly be said to enjoy, in equable estimation with their associates, the positive occupancy of a profession.

Shakespeare’s plays must not be lost to the sight of the actor. In the steady re-adaptation to which they are constantly being put to fit them more congruously to the advanced appliances and methods of these

palmy days of highly progressed mechanism and painters' art, we are in eventual fearful danger of such a compromising condition. Today in America, the actor (generally speaking) has little learned knowledge of the glossy ruggedness, inspiring awfulness, and immutable beauties of the original designs of this Himalayan Histrionic Supremacy. It is as though the clergyman were accorded his ordination totally unlearned in the manifold blessings, and o'er-towering sovereignty of the Bible. The actor owns scarcely more than a fleeting retention of the few lines he is compelled to speak in a passing presentation of some one of the "specially" prepared versions of this poetic-drama chain of unsevered links, which must ever, in imperishable grandeur, hold together the institution of the theatre.

The Shakespeare religion of yesterday is still the religion of the future. It must not be understood that I would assertively exalt the theatre above the Church; no indeed. It is in the most perfect allied condition of the home, the school, and the Church that their consummate union—the State—must find its trust grandeur. And we see here, in the co-essential parts of this trinity, the predominant, vital importance of its mental centre—education. It is through the highest power of education that the greatest national welfare has ever existed. The home (the physical charge) and the Church (the moral care) equip through co-efficient, co-harmonious alliance with the school (the mental activity essential to the highest understanding of body and soul) the medium of the State's achievements—intellectual and sound men and women. Every vocation, art and trade should be an embodiment of this trinity. And as each honestly strove for exaltedness and supremacy, so should

it be equally regarded and rewarded in its special beneficence to that consummated union — the State. And to that extent that each might dishonestly and viciously maintain its practices, just to that extent should it be equally condemned and punished.

In every lasting beneficence to a nation or to mankind, we see the single force of some great leadership. Christ lived in the time of atheism and hypocritical formalism. It is illogical to bring every letter of his then well-timed, needed teachings into this enlightened age. The evolution of their then prophetic significance has brought their spiritual beneficence now to us here on earth. But the idealism of the man grows more o'ertowering as the ages appear. The spirit of his leadership defies the doubt of thoughtful man. The emulation of his indestructible singleness is still the immovable staff which shall ever command the immortal grasp of the Church. But we also confess a leadership in other men. Two centuries and a quarter after the death of Confucius his works were burned and hundreds of his believers buried alive. But the leadership of the man is paramount today. Cæsar — "the foremost man of all this world" — "the noblest man that ever lived in the tide of times" (murdered by the innocence of his nobility) will ever be heard through his leadership in a literary purity of a fundamental language, as unshaken today as ever by the dissoluble qualities of national motherhood.

Shakespeare is such as these. No vain supremacy of facetious pomposity can ever obliterate the lustre of his immortal leadership. What rational mind can deny the predominance of the English tongue today? What reputable speech cannot pronounce its paragon! What massed endangerments of gibberish "isms" (unstayed by the timidity of changing politics, selfish

ambitions, and legislative corruption) can ever, in their gathering gloom, obscure the brightness of this solitary leadership? Why, then, longer lend the slightest aid to the ill-weaponed assailants of such an uncensurable fortress, who strive to bury in the ashes of ill-burned pages such fadeless perennity? Throw wider open this vault of histrionic completeness. It shall vindicate us!

In a researchful study of the works of Shakespeare we may claim an ownership to a rather concise text-book of the history and best uses of our modern language. He who so wills may hold the front door key to the house of sufficient knowledge; a possession which, if used, and the domain once entered, will incite a voluntary and eager desire to ransack the whole house. That such advantage has been long and universally accepted, and constantly increases in interest to all thoughtful and educated people is, beyond all doubt, most true. Although I offer no positive statistics to verify the following statement (I do not believe it to be necessary), yet, from my intimate acquaintance with every condition of stage folk, and my critical observance of the better class of theatre goers, I do not hesitate to say that, from both an educational point of view and as a divertimento, this enjoyable practical text-book of our language finds by far greater odds more reverence, devotion, and understanding from the people who view the stage than from those being viewed, generally speaking. Such a condition is diametrically wrong.

Shakespeare was originally and distinctly of and for the theatre. In the presentation alone of his plays still offering a measure of adaptability to present-day stage appointments, how can he command proper attention when the medium through which he

is interpreted underrates in comprehension the general understanding of the auditors to whom this medium labors to reveal the depths and grandeur of the poet's tremendousness? To say that the educational importance of these plays bears no kin to the highest development of their dramatic possibilities, that is, that an actor need not become a Shakespearian student to be enabled to forcibly delineate the personages of these marvellous works, bears much truth, it is true. The ineradicable nobility and lasting permanency of their *diction* affords even mediocre inherent dramatic ability a vast scope for theatrical display. But it is that very potency of the predominance of the *poet's* diction that exalts the *player*, and by self-satisfaction of that exaltedness, too often fills him with a sense of proficiency which robs him of the thought of any necessity to better understand (that in such higher knowledge he may the better and more powerfully interpret) the great themes and variations of this genius composer. And thereby (and of far more importance) immeasurably add to his qualification for the art he possesses. The actor pauses at that point where his natural aptness finds a ready applicability. *There is where he should begin.*

If in a research of the works of Shakespeare we see a text-book of educational value, we furthermore see in these dramatic inspirations, ranging as they do from the simplest language to the sublimest flights of dramaturgy, and encompassing every mood and manner of possible expression, text-books for playwright and actor, if regulated into practical, preparatory and progressive systems of instruction. The adoption of such (prefaced with elementary training in the fundamentals of play writing and acting), coupled with a compulsory discipline in its accom-

panying educational research (a vital importance), does not seem beneath the highest ratification of our institutions of learning, in a collegiate course, graduating its students, after proper *qualification*, into some established medium of activity maintained (at least at first) by endowment and legacy, and furnishing to the incumbent the *status* necessary to insure a dignity and following that such a calling is worthy of.

The works of Shakespeare cannot remain forever available to dramatic representation. I believe for centuries yet they may still be played. But they are a legacy to the stage as great and imperishable as any bequeathed to this world. They are the exaltation of the stage. It has never known a true condition of stability, a hope of permanency, or a continuancy of unshakable grandeur. Here, exemplifying the inmost nobility of all that ever entered, trod, and transcended the stage and drama, lies dormant, through a lack of right devotion and highest use, the redemption, salvation, and indissoluble perpetuity of the theatre!

The day will sometime come when mere controversy regarding the possibility or audacity of rightfully or falsifiably imprinting some appellative usurpation to the images of his creating must cease, worn away by the bristling opposition that its friction aroused. That critical analysis and discussion of these plays has always been, and must ever go on, is the vital existence of their educational worth. Here the research must be deep. We must seek to restore, theorize, and speculate. But their fanciful beauties must not become marred nor lost in critical exaction. We should not forget that we are working in the visionary realms of the theatre. And to that extreme in which we indulge our desire for educational advantages, just to that opposite end must we seek to expurgate,

eliminate, and regulate these dramas to modern uses in presentation; to make them, in preservation of theme and individual characterization, suitable, adaptable, and entertaining to present-day expectancy. It would be folly to run the stage coach of Colonial times in the grooves of the roadbeds of the advanced railway systems of today. But I doubt if the stuff now so conveyed has grown approximately better by the superior methods of such ultraism.

I believe if the great playwright himself could appear among us today, he would rearrange his lustrous jewels in the most beautiful and effective settings that modern stagecraft would permit of. To present his plays now as they were supposed to have been performed in his day is a mere curiosity, valuable principally in the immediate circle of educational importance. It would be like advertising some great virtuoso to play the "Moonlight" sonata on an instrument in vogue in its incomparable composer's time, dressed in the fashion of the day. Or even more so. It would be a curiosity at most. If the theme and diction of these great masters be kept intact, it is no sacrilege or iconoclasm to emphasize the variegated colors of the robes that clothe them. But it must be done by those whose intellectual grasp and taste would sympathetically most qualify for such a task. Those who have become studiously and devotedly imbued with the spirit through the happy discipline of such qualification.

I do not maintain that a required qualification as previously herein outlined would ensure Shakespearian playwrights and actors, great men and women. The appearance from period to period of an array of great actors does not signify any special consequence to the stage, and, it is proved, does not

guarantee any subsequent general progressed condition arising from their resplendent brief hour in the theatre. But, nevertheless, not one English speaking actor of any worthy individual distinction in the higher drama has ever denied an indebtedness to his devotion and study of Shakespeare for the degree of distinction to which he had risen. Absolute satisfaction through critical and public acceptance in the great roles of the dramatist may not have been his, but it was in the strife to attain that estimation in the Shakespeare drama that made him pre-eminently fitted to adorn and honor the stage and himself in special parts, for the best interpretation of which he had applied the results of his persistent struggle to o’ertop his gained supremacy by attention and favor in the essayal of some few of the classic roles. That is the test of any actor’s genuine success or greatness. In the annals of the stage of this hour, in recording the event of a truly deserved jubilee to an actress of unique superiority, it will be written that, in responding to her heartfelt gratitude for the loving honor paid to her devoted public service, this actress in a speech of telling briefness confessed that she owed everything to her training and education in Shakespeare. It is this spirit of duty, reverence and adherence, ingrafted at the inception of a stage career, that bears its golden fruits most abundantly. And it must be by a practical, systematic, compulsory discipline in Shakespeare, through educational channels, that we shall see the stage truly exalted; that we shall attain in substantial, respected fact—a “profession of the theatre.” How can any boast of the stage to an equality with other high vocations, a comparative importance with the Church in a beneficence to mankind, hold proper credence, when

there is no fixed qualification for admittance to its practices, and its encumbents are readily recruited from the ranks of ignorance, pretence and charlatanry, and with like indiscretion stubbornly maintained by the vulgar agent who instated them?

Today in our large universities, departments of dramatic literature and oratory appear almost essential to a most complete system of higher education. And yet it cannot be truthfully said that these auxiliary needs find an outlet, a medium of positive significance for any future design of active permanency for those who may have taken advantage of them. But that is not to gainsay their natural value in such wise and general usage of them. But in such an acknowledged intrinsical initiative, what could we not with positive reasonableness see (in such a healthy stimulus) for the nucleus of a trial at least (I am tempted to say an educational duty) in the matter of a department of the *theatre* in leading universities? I do not like to say *drama*. It is too limitable. It is time that the *theatre* began to command its true dignity and potency!

Who can deny that embodied in the works of the great personage who most singularly with distinct individualism marked the highest exaltedness of the theatre, who vitalized it into imperishable grandeur, — who can gainsay that in the illitigatable legacy of this simple man, who, as playwright-actor-manager, in that unity proclaiming the immortality of the consummation of such union, the *theatre*, — who can deny in such a spirit of endless endurance the existence of a formula to create a criterion of study, qualification and criticism, attainable through a compulsory disciplinary system of procedure? Therein we see a duty, a faith, — an affection for the vocation.

Therein we find a high end to our worthy means; no questionable means to our selfish ends. And therein we glorify the institution that our duty, faith and affection urges us to labor for. We are not entering it unprepared, unconcerned and unmeritedly, with feverish speculativeness, fretting it may overlook our glorification. Then the men and women of the stage find some equality of condition. There is some sense of true equity through this equal opportunity of *qualification*. Here we find a *status* for the *profession of the theatre*. The playwright, the manager, the actor, ascend the rostrum with the same gained privilege as the clergyman his pulpit. The mere sock and buskin no longer proclaim the actor. The man has earned their significance, as the priest his cloth, and both should wear them sacred to the temple they adorn. The stage needs this conditional status as much as does the Church.

The playwright-manager-actor, the theatre — must know this status, must obey this qualification, must reverence their high significance. In the sympathy and co-operation of such lies the unshaken grandeur of their temple. And those who accept such a call must not think that their mission to the world is more or less than that of any vocation that strives honestly and ideally to uplift the State, and so invoke its authoritative guardianship. But do not think that the rostrum of the theatre might not transcend the pulpit, if you will it so. Do not feel, when within its environments, that unrestraint which may loose your sense of ideality. The theatre must ever simulate. The Church is real. There nature shall be preached. The theatre holds as broad a beneficence to those who will hold its aim as high. The playwright-manager-actor must all be felt in the

idealism of the task. As great a battle may be lived and fought for individual supremacy as that inspired by the solitude of the pulpit. As honest a laurel awaits the victory. But we must maintain a fitting medium through which to consummate our qualification.

Unshaken by the test of time, unassailable by the taunts of mortal cunning, the significant imperishableness of Shakespeare's leadership points the way to lasting grandeur and indissoluble exaltedness of the lofty design that such supreme immortality ever commands. To cast aside all skepticism and trumpery attack, and—with a firm belief—to enlist under the sovereign laureateship of such absolute supremacy, and march to knowledge victory through a confidence in that belief, is the religion that shall lastingly preserve the highest purity of the theatre. The belief that waits on knowledge provokes the doubt that loses both. Forward—march!

Number fifteen of "Stage Affairs," appearing April 23, 1907, concerns:

THE NEW THEATRE.

A SUGGESTION REGARDING THE PERMANENT EXALTED-
NESS OF THE STAGE.

29 1907
A series of fifteen pamphlets issued weekly on Tuesdays
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ALLEN DAVENPORT



BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

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- XIV. Shakespeare: The Future Highest Value of His Plays to the Stage.
- XV. The New Theatre: A Suggestion Regarding the Permanent Exaltedness of the Stage.

Stage Affairs in America Today.

—BY—

ALLEN DAVENPORT.

XV.

THE NEW THEATRE.

A SUGGESTION REGARDING THE PERMANENT EXALTED-
NESS OF THE STAGE.

The establishment and stable maintenance of a national or municipal theatre in this country is unreasonable to suppose. Existing political conditions do not permit of the conduction of either for the best desired purposes of the drama. We must look to the endowed theatre. But of what avail is such a theatre to the future of the stage if there is no condition of *qualified* substantiality required to enter, promote and maintain it? The endowed theatre then stands for no more than any other kind.

A theatre under endowment should be a dramatic art institute with a standard of approximate highest attainment, by means of which to encourage, advance, and uphold the best designs of its workmanship ; and upon which to base criticism, stimulate taste, create discriminate judgment, and so advance amicable discussion with tendency to harmonize opinions on stage representations. This theatre of dramatic art should,

at all times, through its official independence to furnish suitable entertainment, beneficially persuade, amuse, and instruct. It should indeed, "Show — virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and — the very age and body of the time his form and pressure." Such a theatre should encourage and promote, in first importance, any native productiveness of qualified worthiness. Then, the testedly valuable dramatic literature past and present. These should be exhibited in consistent proficient art form, reflecting a pure native diction from the plainest speech to the most highly cultivated, from the commonest dialogue to the sublimest poetry. The strong characters of all periods should be personified therein,— their customs, virtues, vices, foibles, sentiments, etiquette, dress, etc.,— sufficiently depicting, as approximately as mechanical device and artist's brush will permit, the locations and scenes in which these characters lived and acted. It should acquaint us with their history and religion, and as far as it may be practical, display something of the arts and industries produced during their time. What one sees and hears from its stage should become at once for him, a criterion of what is best, proper and correct.

Furthermore this theatre should, at its inception at least, through its exclusive election and controlling agency, permit of independent managements of first class presenting to the public that of the highest merit in current vogue and favor, of melodrama, comedy-drama and farce. It should also entertain such foreign matter as may be of desired literary and artistic value, and intellectual profit. We could not too forcibly, in the beginning at least, urge this condition of independent amicable relationship with its worthiest

companions. It is in an eventual natural conjoining of such matured worthiness and increasing healthiness, that we must heal the dismembered form and restore its essential symmetry.

The influences exerted and benefits to be derived from endowed theatres should not be restricted merely to any one locality, theatrical centre, but spread as widely as possible throughout the length and breadth of the land. Their work should be carried beyond the immediate district which serves as their home. They should extend their influence over a circuit of the more important cities about the centre in which their home theatre is instituted.

The theatre, to bring its mission to the highest fulfilment, must be wrested from the lacerative commercial lash that now forces its art bondage, and liberated by the revolutionary installation of men and women who have studiously and zealously prepared for the practice of their art, and have been equably graduated to it through some significant qualification. What is truly worthy in the theatre today cannot be deposed. It will maintain itself by virtue of its genuineness. But it must be weeded of carrioned parasites, or suffocate in their gathering stench. And if the endowed theatre shall ever stand for any intrinsic intention, a new stamen must be rooted, and evolved through a higher education for the actor, furnishing a qualification, and creating a status that shall attain a degree proclaiming some unquestionable certainty as to its holder's privilege to practice the accumbent of his studious preparation. There must be an honored and openly respected "profession of the theatre." There must be a required high qualification to practise it, secured through an educational system of procedure

for playwright, manager, and actor, graduating them into a medium of activity at once distinct, sympathetic, and co-operate with the constancy of their preparation. I merely suggest that it might be accomplished by a combined complete course of educational import in the dramatic literature of Shakespeare, and through elementary conditions of the art of playwriting, and by progressive studies of the plays most adaptable to a preparatory state of the art of acting; fundamental knowledge of play building and dramatic expression. Out of this qualification would come the status to dignify the "profession of the theatre," the playwright-actor-manager, the co-essential forces to work efficiently and harmoniously to uplift the institution their unity forms. That is the "profession of the theatre."

And (to quote from the opening paragraph in number one of *Stage Affairs in America Today*) "the playwright is the very heart of this tri-essence, and should (its other co-essential factors working all in trinitarian confederacy) pulsate into vigorous life and health the substance which this vital union shapes, — the institution of the theatre." But we do not gain-say the just importance of manager and actor. Notwithstanding it would be as absurd to try to elevate the theatre through the offices of endowment by the mere supplying of good actors and sagacious business managers, as it would be to attempt to perpetuate the cause of music by solely educating to a high degree its interpreter — the instrumentalist, and instating efficient business capacity to direct him. Of what intrinsic avail are they without a supply of accomplished and worthy composers? Of what use are good actors without good plays to put them in? They are

like a winning crew in a rotten shell. And how is it possible for an endowed theatre, directed by an individual not in harmony or sympathy with the vital spirit of its high intentions or cognizant or educated to the true quality of the actor's importance, to properly maintain the beneficence of its mission? It could not properly so do.

It would seem presumptuous anticipation, just now, to outline any systematic plan for the orderly conduction of such an endowed theatre. It would take many years to primarily determine, and eventually bring the stipulated conditions to a state of useful fixedness and realization of their just importance. But I would like to say this much, that, in the anticipation of so feasible a scheme, and in such an expansive country as ours, would seem necessary at first, an agreeably united, and quite general movement in universities, colleges (and perhaps specially appointed academies of dramatic art), throughout the eastern, western and central centres of the country. A sympathetic chain. The matter of endowed theatres in which to engage such qualification could progress as the preparatory condition seemed to rationally warrant. These theatres should be under the control of a learned board of direction ; to independently make its special appointments of playwright, manager and actor to its individual controlment, but sympathetically in general purpose and result. But the duties and authorities of playwright, actor and manager should be clearly stipulated and duly respected, and not to be interfered with by such board of direction, except in the event of some misdemeanor, laxity, or inefficiency of office. Then such board of direction assumes the authority to dismiss or regulate such disorder. And the separate offices of

playwright, actor, and manager should know some determined distinction and individual duty which should be rigidly adhered to in harmonious and sympathetic workmanship, and, between themselves, signally and equally understood and respected. In case of inevitable disputes that ever arise from time to time in associations of all arts and trades, this board of direction again assumes the position of authority and seeks to regulate such unavoidable differences.

All these departmental conditions should be embodied originally in a single bond of *organization* governing all theatres under such endowments, and receiving the same specified graduation of this equable *qualification*.

Endowed theatres of permanent abode, having regularly instated companies, should importantly maintain a playwright. More than one if so wished. The playwright should be under no undue constraint to furnish plays for these theatres, but of course there should be some compulsory determination to the task. While employed in translations, adaptations, revisions, etc., he should find opportunity, freed from all pecuniary worry, to properly engage in the enjoyment of original composition. In the production of such he should receive just consideration, assistance and protection from the theatre engaging him, and be allowed the unrestrained privilege of privately controlling, and elsewhere universally exhibiting, his workmanship should it prove worthy of such wide attention. But I believe his labor belongs first to that institution which harbors him. At that hour when his art is universally accepted, his own individualism must assert its supremacy, and naturally sever his bond of constraint.

The theatre to find its highest ends must enlist a condition of genuine seriousness and consequent respect in a qualified class of playwright studied and learned mostly in a *diction* of sufficient *metrical form*, *lucidity*, and *pointedness* to bespeak a language *intellectual*, *elegant* and *effectual* in its *simple*, *intermediary*, and *sublime* uses. Thereon may the actor build his art. But that actor cannot properly so do unless he himself has gained that same studied and learned discipline which may enable him equally to mentally grasp and expose such essential predominance. It is the vital storage force which contains the variety of expressions possible, and inspires the effort to reveal such. I do not gainsay the value at all times of embellishing pantomime, gesture and effective "business," if rationally and thoughtfully employed. They are the necessary "tricks of the trade." But too often they are used irrelevant to the significance of the context, with extravagant, meaningless purpose; often nothing more than a deceitful condiment to an unpalatable hash, which can delude only the unfastidious taste. The unmitigated viciousness of many play builders to obscure, in the substitution of over-laden mechanical devices, strained situations, and effective(?) "business," their total inefficiency to write decent compositions, and the dangerous peril caused by managers ever greedy to exhibit them, provokes a state of constant injury to the theatre, the art it should uphold, and to the social condition they have the power to promote.

The theme and construction of a play are the foundation upon which it rests. They afford the preliminary essentials upon which to build. Their principal requisites are form and regularity. It is

not difficult to provide either. In contemplating the construction of an edifice we sometimes appropriate this form and regularity directly from natural sources ; oftentimes we transplace from former fundaments. But what is the predominant character that gives to this edifice usefulness and beauty? Its architectural design. That which bespeaks its grandeur. We often take from natural sources the theme for our play ; sometimes we transplace from former fundaments. The greatest have ever done so. We have then but to construct with a sufficient degree of regularity. But to raise this structure to loftiness of character, to usefulness and beauty, that is, if we would truly proclaim its splendor, we must seek the studied, varied and imaginative skill of architectural design,—the cultivated art of lofty diction ! Without this gradiloquence, action, “business” and “effects” are but the mere trumperies we might hang on our cellar walls. They do not signify the vitality of the playwright’s workmanship.

Few playwrights of today hold the dominant type of manager in any special regard except in a servile struggle to secure a hearing, which, when once obtained, and a measure of success assured, most often reverses the conditions. Except in a few cases where the actor becomes highly necessary for the furtherance of pecuniary gain, he commands no respect and little consideration from either playwright or manager. And yet this same actor, although loudly denouncing the dictatorial exercise of both the former, continually stoops to the meanest services to obtain audience and favor. And both playwright and manager have arrogantly transplaced the substantial art of the stage manager by the whimsical substitution of their pecun-

iary interest. "It is my property which is at stake," cry they out. It is no wonder then that the "high-salaried paraders" in the "show business" today assume a "warrantable" attitude of superiority, indifference, and often disobedience towards the poor little man who suffers their presumptuousness, disrespect, and commandments while "ringing up" and "ringing down" the curtain, and sees the importance of his office merely in the type of the programme sheet, which innocently accords him the post of "stage manager."

In a just organization of the theatre there should be no falter in the estimate either of his executive command over the artists he directs, or of their respect and concurrent obedience to him. The stage manager should be the paragon of actors. Then the scenic artist and musician, the costumer, the wig maker, and the skilled mechanic shall feel an honestly acquired condition rightfully asserting its predominance, and they also will obey and respect it. And these shall be worthy of their hire,—the artist and the artisan. That condition of "local stage manager" in theatres throughout the country having no stationary company, should be known by some such appropriate title as "foreman."

The *palmy days* of the theatre convey scarcely any more meaning than the passing through of certain periods in the affairs of the stage when a greater number of distinguished players, "stars," have flourished than in the intervening years. Such is only a natural phenomena peculiar to all phases of employment. It is just as common to learned vocations as to all others, but is seen less in such from the very fact of that existing necessary state of compulsory discipline which

ever tends towards a general equalization of all original crudeness that must quite nearly, alike yield to the mouldable process of education. The theatre, in the possession of such continue solidity, need no longer wait upon the inconstancy of histrionic phenomenon for its exaltedness. Equitably qualified, the actor enters an organization which shall respect and guard the just significance of such equity. If he be peculiarly fitted to predominately attract and shine, to be a "star," he will there find his special preferment as readily as does in his special sphere, the signally gifted clergyman, attorney, or physician. There, we must confess, each might feel a dominating desire for pecuniary gain in the pursuit of his vocation, but he could not lay claim to the right to practise that profession without first having undergone a compulsory preparatory discipline. And he very soon knows that he cannot rest secure alone on that primary condition, even in his eagerness for ample remuneration.

To call the theatre a profession has been from the beginning, and is today, presumptuous vanity. It never has, and does not now, demand of its incumbents any compulsory state of disciplinary learning. Its ranks have ever been, and still are, carelessly recruited from every condition of life; from tutored refinement to illiterate degradation. And thus disorderly intermingled, with frictional unnaturalness, such vainly labor to assimilate their opposite moods into a regulated quality that they would name—a profession. It is an utter impossibility under such a laxity of any attempt to exact a condition of learned qualification, to ever raise the theatre to the dignity of a profession. Schools of acting, systems of training, even practical stage experience, brought to the highest state of pro-

ficiency, cannot in themselves alone elevate the stage one jot. Its incumbents must know that disciplinary preparation which furnishes a proper qualification to be justly recognized and unswervingly upheld by the institution that requires it. Then we have a profession as rightfully claimed, and as respectfully viewed as any that finds its inception in the fostering care of our learned institutions.

How can lasting good evolve out of an institution where scarce a voice from within ever has, or does sincerely say,—“Young man, young woman, enter here; for there is no chosen field of labor that can so earnestly entreat your highest character, honesty, and culture!” How can increasing good evolve out of an establishment wherein its greatest light, enjoying the cheering sense of vast remuneration, public applause, and personal gratification, takes up his pen and abhorrently counsels the young aspirant (who has earnestly besought his advice) to seek any occupation else under the sun where he might gain a bare “living” rather than go upon the stage? Or again,—wherein an overtowering intellect, bequeathing honored distinction to his country through rare idealism, talent, and devotion to his art, sighs in his greatest hour that he had not rather directed that mental force towards some vocation truly worthy? Search among the living to-day! Hear—in the retirement of every luxury—the wails of the mightiest histrionism sorrowing for the sad condition of the noble art of acting. Read (with rare exception) the disparaging, and too often discouraging notes sounded from our “foremost notables” to the graduates of dramatic schools. I will not go on indefinitely, but only add my own modest decrual.

Before I entered upon a career of professionalism (ardently ambitious, devotedly serious, and studiously inclined) not one voice inside or outside the realms of the theatre would or did utter a sincere word of encouragement to wisely spur me on to such a rashness. Associating and studying with actors justly recognized and famed throughout two continents, daily clerking in a generally considered desirable and genteel business among gentlemen highly esteemed and respected, continually seeking and being sought by amateur dramatic and operatic societies of acknowledged abilities, notwithstanding, never did I find a voice who dared applaud in me the thoughts of a stage career. Inside and outside the theatre world, but one opinion in general was held of that institution by both wise men and fools,—that it was a *rotten* business. I did not believe it. I entered this state of reputed histrionic putrefaction. I became an actor, enduring all environments which voluntarily unlocked their doors to me. Alas! I have seen, lived, and vindicated the *truth* of all such admonitions. My unrestrained apology lies herein. Friends,—you were right! The theatre is a rotten business. But I as unrestrainedly proclaim that I do not believe it need be so, and that with all of you I shall hope to see, live, and vindicate in the future the falsity of that present truth.

Let us then with hope, work, and patience sow the seeds of truth and beauty that shall some day flower forth in such abundance as to cast the fatal gloom of quick decay on these weeds of falsity, corruption, and vulgar show. Unflinchingly take our stand and justly fight against the intrusion of ignorance, dishonesty, and pretence into the domain of increasing beauty. Let it not be a common mart for vulgar trade! A cur-

tained refuge for avaricious exploitations of sensationalism, scandal, and vulgar notoriety. Neither a corrupt exchange where monies and titles of unbalanced impressionability may purchase into the lime-light of ill-repute debasements of a worthy title, to which, although they hold no true and skilful right, they clamorously claim possession. Nor let it sink into a carnal agency to furnish lavish idlers with tender toys, and so crushing the hope of some trusting heart, destroying all faith, affection, sensitiveness; and perhaps inflaming them to such jealousy and insanity that might lead to fatal indiscretions that no technical legal mastery ought atone for.

We know that the stage will never be free from many vicious qualities, besetting evils; all professions however honorable in their highest calling possess them; but to a great general satisfaction, methodical organism, qualification, and the establishing of a status—a criterion for dramatic art through higher education—would rid the theatre of people who follow it only for the base sensual liking, notoriety, and vulgar business ends; people who all too soon scoff and sneer, but yet remain to stagnate its higher purposes.

The profession of the theatre and the ennobling art of acting is worth such pains, or otherwise it had rather better be relegated to the realms of oblivion, effaced from the list of fine arts and accomplishments, attainments to be consummated only by years of methodical preparation, study, and finish through the concatenate mediums and essential forces of higher education and an honest strife for individual supremacy.

Today, the managers and agents who cockily strut the walks of the "rialto," and snugly roost in the dust

of their dingy coops, comprise (with very few exceptions) a mass of *conspicuous nothingness*. They do not deserve the smallest consequence of success or merit in their depraved estimate and ignorant understanding of the true nobility of the institution they otherwise vulgarly appropriate, and the art they profanely desecrate.

As to the horde of migratory actors who swoop from corner to corner, from agency to agency, from office to office, awaiting the chance to fight for the solitary crumb that may be thrown from the door of any of the well-stuffed denizens, for them I say, the day of unapt championship is past. The generosity of the better actor to readily condone for and shield the stubborn deficiencies of his less deserving brother, and to ever accord him an estimation thoroughly amiss to a wilful attitude of disregard and neglect of attempted attainment to the proper essentials that should characterize a man pursuing an art occupation, such magnanimity should be as equally and positively reversed to an earnest endeavor to remove from the march of progress such stuffy objectionableness. Neither should the worthiest of the stage longer sacrifice at the altar of *jargon controlment*, their art, manhood, and independence.

The man or woman who at some time finds, that, in remaining longer in his self-chosen vocation, he is belittling his manhood and talents, and so considers his condition a mere condescension, and consequently forsakes that self-elected occupation, is as much to be censured as the man who, in still abiding condescension, does not lift his hand or voice in honest endeavor to add only that little which lies within the power of his single energy to better the general condi-

tion of that vocation of which he is a part. And if any man doing this much, willingly and uncomplainingly enduring all the dishonest, ill-mannered, and illiterate abuse of the *sovereign peasantry* that rules the theatre in America today, if he has literally been turned from its every avenue of traffic, and while still trying to lend devoted, honest, and truthful benefit to that chosen highway, it still is within his possibility to open a new and broader avenue if he does not fear the *anarchical vulgar hand* of art assassination.

There should always exist in equal distinctive rank, the opera—grand, romantic, and comic, (permitting of genuine burlesque), the drama—tragedy, romance, and comedy (including genuine farce), and the vaudeville—the diverting, wholesome trivialties of stage entertainment. Each should require a qualification for the practice of its special art. Everything aside from these would then naturally be forced into some exclusive classification. There will always remain the charlatan, the fakir, and the audience to gape at him. And it behooves the State, the unitive authority over all national conditions, to promote and safeguard that which is qualifiedly worthy from the ruthless invasion and contaminating influence of that which is endangering. The force of such directorship will not be withheld if the beneficence of the institution of the theatre is purely felt in an honest and idealistic strife of special individualism towards a perfected common union.

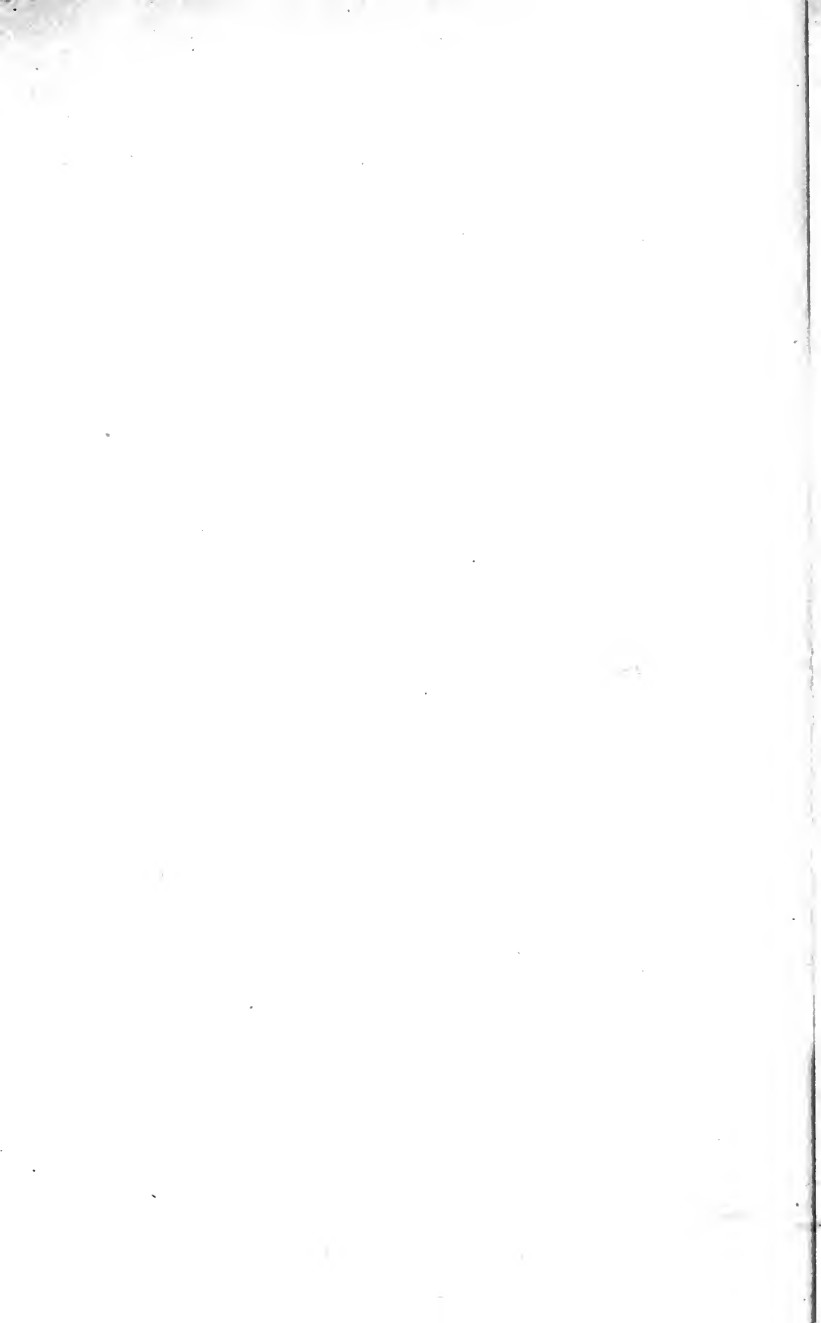
Show beneficence a tangible qualification of educational import, and his activity will bustle in the welfare of the theatre as quickly as in any purpose of dignified worthiness.

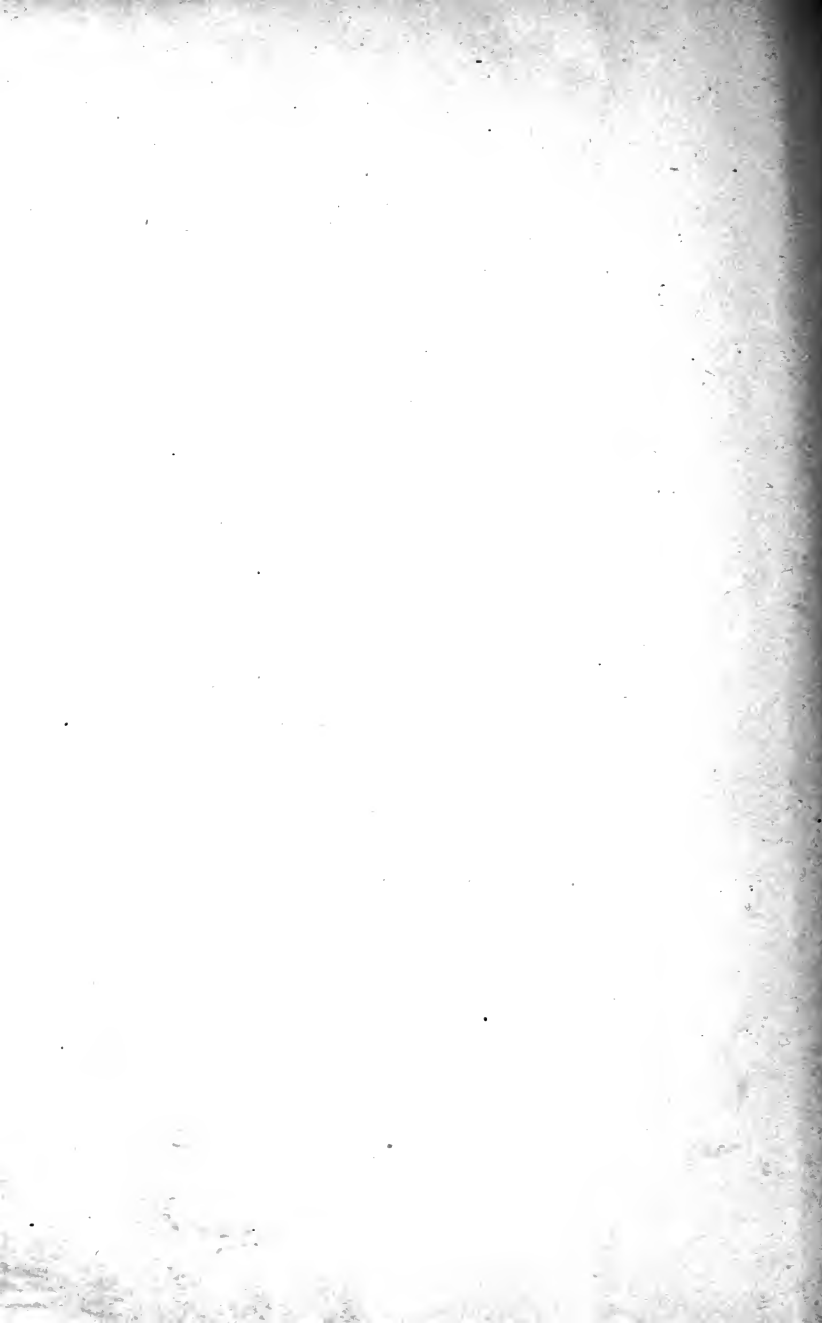
I believe in the theatre! I love, revere, and respect every condition of it that tends through integrity and decency to amuse, persuade, and instruct mankind; every condition that strives to uplift, correct, and guide the higher instincts. But when these conditions do not exist,—when I know that there is too often no special effort to have them exist, but rather a spirit of intentioned, palpable substitution of dishonesty and questionable propriety,—I do not count myself disloyal to that institution and its incumbents in honestly and openly saying, that under such conditions, the theatre has not, does not, nor can it ever truthfully fulfill to mankind the tremendous possibilities which its mission foretells. Neither will it until it shall itself feel, and transmit to worthy judgment, an unmistakable sense of qualified learning, soundly vibrating through the harmonious cords of its human instrumentality, the playwright—manager—actor, the profession of the theatre!

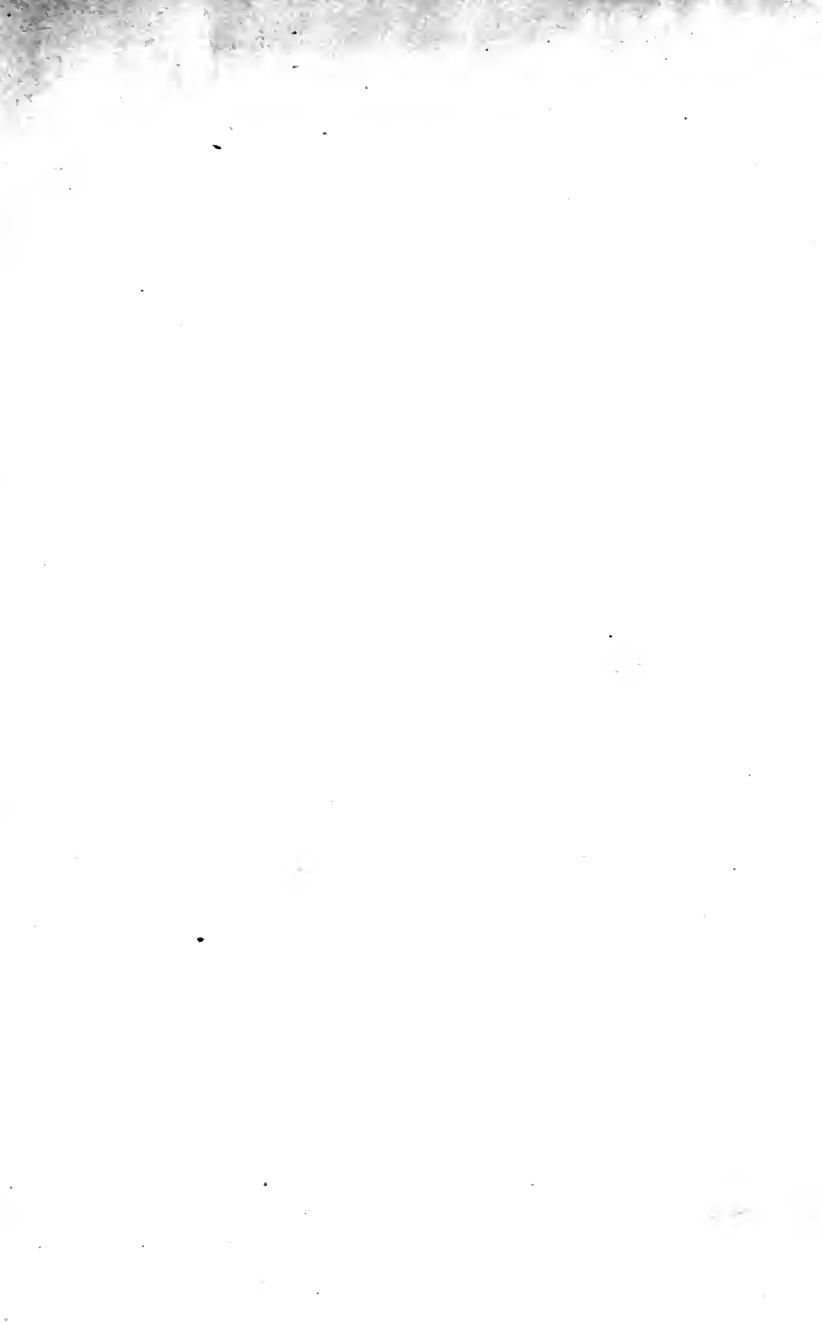












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